



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

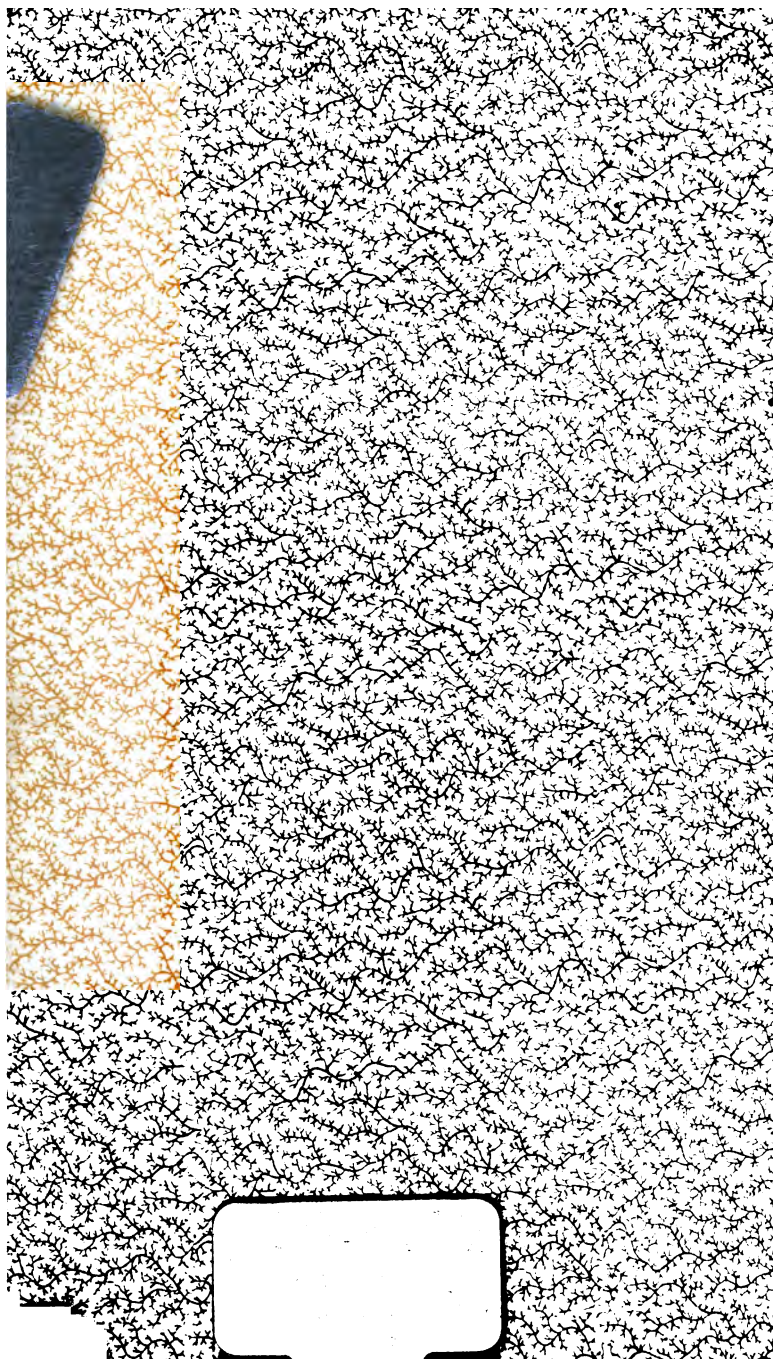
Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>



Handwritten: Handwritten

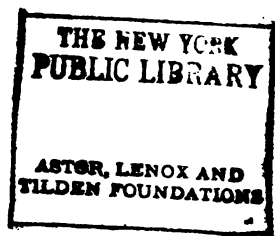


THE
L I F E
OF
WILLIAM COWPER, ESQ.

BY
ROBERT SOUTHEY, ESQ., LL. D.,
POET LAUREATE, ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.
NEW YORK:
PUBLISHED BY
J. B. BROWN,
111 NASSAU ST.
BOSTON:
OTIS, BROADERS, AND COMPANY.
1839.



NOY WEN
3188
YASSEL

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

COWPER'S BIRTH, FAMILY, AND EDUCATION.

	Page.
1731. BORN in the rectory, Berkhamstead.....	1
That place remarkable in history.....	1
Not related to the Scotch Bishop Cowper.....	2
Name of his family first mentioned in 1465.....	2
His mother's family.....	3
Her epitaph.....	4
1737. Cowper sent to school at Market Street, Hertfordshire.....	5
Cruelly treated there by one of the boys.....	5
1739. Placed in the house of an oculist on account of a disease in his eyes.....	7
1741. Sent to Westminster school.....	7
1745. The small-pox relieves his eyes.....	7
His character in boyhood misrepresented by himself.....	7
His complaint that religion had been neglected in his edu- cation.....	8
Confirmation at Westminster.....	10
Scene in St. Margaret's churchyard.....	10
Fancies himself consumptive.....	11
His recollections of Westminster pleasurable.....	11
Advantages which he gained there.....	13
His schoolfellows.....	14

CHAPTER II.

COWPER IN A SOLICITOR'S OFFICE AND IN THE TEMPLE. FIRST INDICATIONS OF A DISEASED MIND. HIS EARLY FRIENDS. THUR- LOW. HILL. THE NONSENSE CLUB.

1749. COWPER articled to Mr. Chapman.....	16
Thurlow his fellow-clerk.....	17
His idleness.....	18
Takes chambers in the Temple.....	18
First appearance of his malady.....	19
He thinks his cure supernatural.....	20
1754. Called to the bar.....	22

	Page.
1756. Death of his father	22
1757. Removes to the Inner Temple	23
Commissioner of bankrupts	23
His first love	23
Verses on his disappointment	24
His early poems preserved by Miss Cowper	25
This disappointment not the cause of his madness	26
1758. Translation of a Latin letter written by him at this time, Aug. 17.	26
Cowper of a poetical family	27
The Nonsense Club	27
Joseph Hill	28
His cordial friendship for Cowper	28
Sportive promise of Thurlow	30
1762. Letter to Mr. Clotworthy Rowley, Sept. 2.	30
Cowper's property nearly consumed	32
Cowper in dangerous society	33

CHAPTER III.

COWPER'S LITERARY ASSOCIATES AND FRIENDS. BONNELL THORNTON.
COLMAN. LLOYD.

BONNELL THORNTON	33
George Colman	34
They commence the Connoisseur	34
Periodical Essays	34
Cowper a contributor to the Connoisseur	36
And to the St. James's Chronicle	36
Lloyd and Colman's Odes to Obscurity and Oblivion	37
Gray and Mason take the attack wisely	37
Thornton's Exhibition of Sign-paintings	39
His Ode for St. Cecilia's Day	41
Thornton's Plautus	44
Lloyd	45
Dr. Lloyd	45
Extract from Cowper's Epistle to Lloyd, alluding to his own dangerous state of mind	46
Lloyd resigns his ushership	47
His Actor	50
Intimacy with Churchill	51

CHAPTER IV.

CHURCHILL. COWPER'S EARLY POETICS. HIS ADMIRATION OF
CHURCHILL.

CHURCHILL's marriage	52
He is ordained to a curacy in Somersetshire	53
Succeeds his father in the curacy of St. John's Westminster	54
Compounds with his creditors	55
Assisted by Dr. Lloyd	55

CONTENTS.

vii

	Page.
Separation from his wife	56
The Rosciad.....	57
Lloyd's acknowledgment of his superiority	58
Churchill's Apology.....	58
Night	60
Churchill concerned in the North Briton	60
Scheme of publishing in France to annoy the English government.....	61
Churchill's popularity.....	62
He resigns his cure.....	63
Lives with a mistress	63
His remorse.....	63
Cowper's admiration of Churchill	65
Cowper's political opinions	66
Political ballads.....	66
Politics occasion a difference in the Nonsense Club.....	67
State poems.....	69
St. James's Magazine	70
Charles Denis	71
Lloyd's drudgery.....	73
Lloyd in the Fleet.....	76
Death of Churchill and Lloyd.....	79

CHAPTER V.

COWPER'S LITERARY AMUSEMENTS IN THE TEMPLE. RISE AND PROGRESS OF HIS INSANITY AS RELATED BY HIMSELF.

Cowper compares Pope's Homer with the original throughout.....	80
Translates four books of the Henriade.....	80
Accuses himself of wishing that the Clerk of the Journals might die.....	81
1763. Arrangement in consequence of that gentleman's death....	82
Cowper's own narrative of the consequences.....	83
Letter to Lady Hesketh, Aug. 9.....	85
Cowper at Margate	86
Progress of his disease	86
Whole Duty of Man.....	87
Self-accusation	88
His own account of his madness.....	90
Removed to an asylum at St. Alban's	104

CHAPTER VI.

COWPER'S RECOVERY. HIS REMOVAL TO HUNTINGDON. THE UNWIN FAMILY.

VERSES composed during his madness	105
Cowper at St. Alban's	106
His brother visits him.....	107
Dawn of recovery	107
His account of an instantaneous change.....	109

	Page.
Dr. Cotton.....	110
Cowper's first hymn.....	112
He resigns his commissionership	113
Determination to retire from the world.....	113
His relations subscribe to an allowance for him.....	113
Second hymn	113
Takes lodgings at Huntingdon.....	114
Departure from St. Alban's	114
Feelings on first finding himself among strangers.....	115
Resumes his intercourse with Hill.....	117
Writes to Lady Hesketh.....	117
His emotions when he had seen her last.....	118
Cowper likes his place of abode.....	119
His difficulty in housekeeping	120
State of his finances.....	120
Diminution of his acquaintances.....	121
Hill visits him.....	123
Huntingdon.....	123
His society there	125
He outruns his income.....	127
His spirits sink in solitude.....	127
Introduction to the Unwin family	128
He becomes an inmate there.....	132
His manner of life thought too expensive.....	133
Generosity of an unknown friend	134
And of Mrs. Unwin.....	135
1766. Letter to Lady Hesketh, March 6.....	135
Mrs. Cowper sympathizes in his religious feelings.....	137
Thoughts of taking orders.....	138
His way of life.....	139
1767. Letter to Lady Hesketh, Jan. 30.....	140
His correspondence with her ceases.....	142
Reason for introducing Mr. Unwin to his relations.....	143
He takes to gardening	144
Declines the honorary office of lecturer at Lyon's Inn.....	145
State of his finances.....	146
Mr. Unwin killed by a fall from his horse.....	147

CHAPTER VII.

COWPER'S REMOVAL TO OLNEY. ACCOUNT OF HIS BROTHER'S DEATH.

MR. KNOX's opinion that providential designation is exemplified in Cowper's case	149
Mr. Newton.....	149
Cowper and Mrs. Unwin remove to Olney.....	149
Olney.....	150
His manner of life there.....	152
1769. Letter to Mr. Hill on his recovery, Jan. 21.....	156
He declines his invitation.....	157
His brother's illness.....	158
1771. Letter to Mr. Unwin on his brother's death, March 31....	159
To Mrs. Cowper, on the same.....	161
His sketch of his brother's life, &c.....	164

CHAPTER VIII.

COWPER AT OLNEY. RETURN OF HIS DISORDER. PARTIAL RECOVERY.
MR. NEWTON REMOVES TO LONDON.

	Page.
INTERMISSION of correspondence with Mr. Hill.....	177
1770. Invitation again declined, Sept. 23.....	178
1771. Letter to him on his marriage, Aug. 27.....	178
On his own straitened circumstances, and Mr. Hill's offer of assistance.....	178
The repeated invitation declined	179
Moses Brown.....	180
Mr. Newton's income as curate	181
Mr. Thornton allows him £200 a year	181
Cowper supplied with means for assisting the poor by Mr. Thornton	181
Cowper assists Mr. Newton in composing the Olney Hymns	182
State of his mind evinced in them	183
Statement of a marriage engagement with Mrs. Unwin unfounded	185
Second attack of madness	185
He fixes himself at Mr. Newton's	185
Extracts from Mr. Newton's letters to Mr. Thornton during Cowper's abode with him.....	185
Cowper returns to his own house.....	190
Composes verses during this stage of his malady.....	191
His tame hares.....	192
1776. Letter to Mr. Hill, Nov. 12	193
His love of literature revives.....	194
Opinion of Gray.....	194
Fire at Olney.....	195
Illuminations and bonfires there on the 5th of November forbidden	197
Riot in consequence.....	198
Mr. Newton's house threatened	198
Effect in determining him to remove.....	198
Olney Hymns published.....	199
Cases of insanity among his people	200

CHAPTER IX.

COWPER AT OLNEY. FIRST VOLUME OF HIS POEMS. LADY AUSTEN.

MR. NEWTON introduces Mr. Bull to Cowper.....	201
Feelings on Mr. Newton's departure.....	202
Straitened in his means	202
Sir Thomas Hesketh's death.....	203
Thurlow made Chancellor.....	203
Letter to Mr. Unwin stating Cowper's reason for not writing to Lord Thurlow	203
Cowper's green-house.....	205

	Page.
Employs himself in drawing	207
His neighbors consult him upon points of law	207
He begins his first satire at Mrs. Unwin's suggestion	209
Finishes three more satires in three weeks	210
Motives for publishing	211
Consents to let his name be affixed	212
Mr. Unwin hurt that Mr. Newton should have been employed	213
Mr. Newton's criticisms	214
Cowper asks him to write the preface	215
Delay of the press	216
Useful remarks made in the proof-sheets by the publisher	217
Two more satires begun	218
Green-house made a summer retreat	220
Lady Austen	221
She proposes to settle at Olney	223
Epistle in verse to her	225
Interruption of their friendship	226
Its renewal	232
Doubts whether Mr. Newton's preface should be retained	235

CHAPTER X.

COWPER'S STATE OF MIND. SIMON BROWNE. RECEPTION OF HIS FIRST VOLUME. THE VALEDICTION. STORY OF JOHN GILPIN TOLD HIM BY LADY AUSTEN. THE DISTRESSED TRAVELLERS. MR. NEWTON'S VISIT TO OLNEY. TERMINATION OF THE FRIENDSHIP WITH LADY AUSTEN. MADAME GUYON. INTRODUCTION TO THE THROCKMORTON FAMILY.

MR. NEWTON'S expectations of Cowper's perfect recovery	236
He calls his attention to the case of Simon Browne	238
Cowper dwells upon the difference in their cases	240
Effect of seasons on him	242
Subjects of his first poems judiciously suggested by Mrs. Unwin	245
Anticipations of ill success	246
Letter to Lord Thurlow, with his book	249
Hurt that neither Thurlow nor Colman had thanked him for his volume	250
THE VALEDICTION	252
Cowper encouraged by the approbation of his friends	255
Critical review of his first volume	255
His feelings with regard to the public of Olney	258
Wishes Unwin to review his book	258
Monthly Review	259
Apprehensive that he may write no more poetry for want of a sale	260
Composition wholesome for him	261
His happiness in Lady Austen's society	262
John Gilpin	264
The Royal George	265
THE DISTRESSED TRAVELLERS	266
Lady Austen suggests the Task	268
Mr. Newton's visit	269
Mr. Scott	270

CONTENTS.

xi

	Page.
Fire at Olney.....	271
State of the poor there	275
Mr. Smith enables Cowper to relieve some poor families.....	276
Cowper attached to his place of abode.....	278
Termination of the friendship with Lady Austen	278
Neither jealousy nor disagreement the cause	278
Lady Hesketh's description of Mrs. Unwin.....	279
Cowper's own account of the separation from Lady Austen	280
Mr. Bull.....	282
Translations from Madame Guyon undertaken at his request.....	283
Remarks on his own case in reply to Mr. Bull	284
Letter on the same subject to Mr. Newton	285
His state not so wretched as he describes it.....	287
Wisely managed at this time both by Mrs. Unwin and Mr. Newton	288
Cowper, though fond of society, capable of living in solitude.....	289
Introduction to the Throckmorton family.....	290

CHAPTER XI.

COWPER AT OLNEY. JOHN GILPIN RENDERED POPULAR BY HENDERSON'S RECITATION. PUBLICATION OF THE TASK. RENEWAL OF INTERCOURSE WITH LADY HESKETH.

THE Task offered to Johnson, and accepted.....	293
Jealousy on Mr. Newton's part, that Unwin should have been employed in the negotiation	295
Cowper refuses to let the proofs pass through his hands.....	296
John Gilpin recommended by Mr. Sharp to Henderson for public recitation	297
Its extraordinary success	297
Letter concerning this to Mr. Newton	299
The publisher objects to printing John Gilpin with the Task, but changes his mind.....	300
Letter on the publication to Mr. Newton	302
Letter from Mr. Bacon to Cowper.....	304
Immediate success of the Task.....	307
His situation with regard to his relations	309
Communication with them restored by a letter from Lady Hesketh	310
Letter to Lady Hesketh.....	311
Second letter, in reply to an offer of pecuniary assistance.....	313

ADDITIONAL NOTES AND ILLUSTRATIONS.

Hooker's Epitaph by Cowper's ancestor Sir William.....	317
Cowper's opinion of the Westminster grammars.....	317
Mr. Coleridge on the New Broomers and Public Schools.....	318
Cowper vindicated from the charge of want of feeling on his father's death.....	318
Latin Letter to Clotworthy Rowley, Esq.....	319
Nonsense Club.....	320
Colman at Westminster.....	320

	Page
Cowper's papers in the <i>Connoisseur</i>	320
Contemporary criticism on Gray's <i>Bard</i> and	320
Lloyd and Colman's burlesque <i>Odes</i>	321
Footes's personalities	321
Churchill's boast of his own constitution	321
Churchill's opinions of the care which poetry requires	322
Lloyd on his <i>Magazines</i>	323
Charles Denis	323
Ode <i>Secundum Artem</i> , supposed to be by Cowper	324
Archdeacon Shepherd	325
Lloyd in the Fleet	326
Sir Richard Sutton	327
Whole Duty of Man	327
Olney Hymns	327
Cowper's first volume sent by Mr. Thornton to Dr. Franklin	328
Extract from the Elbow Chair	328
Lace-makers	329

LIFE OF COWPER.

CHAPTER I.

COWPER'S BIRTH, FAMILY, AND EDUCATION.

WILLIAM COWPER, the most popular poet of his generation, and the best of English letter-writers, was born on the 15th of November, (old style,) 1731, in the Rectory, at Great Berkhamstead, Hertfordshire.

The place of his birth is remarkable in English history. The Mercian kings had a palace there; and it again became a royal residence under the first of the Plantagenets, who granted to the men and merchants thereof liberty to trade through all his lands of England, and Normandy, and Aquitain, and Anjou, without paying either custom or exaction; and that they should be quit of all servile works, and be exempt from all tolls, and enjoy the same liberties, laws, and customs, as in the times of Edward the Confessor; and that no market should be held within seven miles of the town. From Henry I.'s time, the honor and castle of Berkhamstead went with the earldom of Cornwall. Twice they were granted to unfortunate favorites; by Edward II. to Piers Gaveston, and by Richard II. to Robert de Vere. Cicely, Duchess of York, and mother of the last of the Plantagenets, resided here during the latter years of her unhappy life; and from the time of her death, the honor of Berkhamstead has descended to the successive princes of Wales with the dukedom of Cornwall. Notable as these circumstances are, this little town will be more known in after ages as the birthplace of Cowper, than for its con-

nection with so many historical personages who figured in the tragedies of old.

We are told that the poet used playfully to moralize upon the pride of pedigree, and to say he believed one of his ancestors had migrated from Scotland in a very humble condition. It is not unlikely that he might have been willing to fancy himself related to a good old Scotch bishop of James the First's time, who was his namesake; but more than this, knowing the history of his own family, he could not¹ have intended; and free as he was, and as every Christian ought to be, from the leaven of ancestral pride, it cannot be supposed that he was insensible to the value of a good name, in the hereditary sense of that word. There is a pleasure in tracing the parentage of an illustrious man as far as records and tradition afford any light, as there is in exploring the sources of a famous river; and no one will depreciate the humble labors of the genealogist, who knows how many useful pursuits are incidentally subserved by such researches.

John Cowper of Strode, in the parish of Slingfield, Sussex, married Joan, the daughter and heiress² of John Stanbridge, of the same parish, in the sixth year of Edward IV., 1465. This appears to be the first mention of a name which afterwards is found repeatedly among the sheriffs of London. Their descendant, Sir William Cowper, was created a baronet of Nova Scotia, and afterwards (in 1631-2) of England, and knighted at Theobald's in the following year. Ratling Court, in Nonington, Kent, was his seat at that time; and he is memorable for having erected a monument to Hooker in the neighboring church of Bishopsbourne, more than thirty years after his death, with an epitaph of his own composed in verse. The principles which

¹ In one of his letters he says that he was originally of Fifeshire, and that a family of his name still existed there. But Bishop Cooper was a native of Edinburgh; and families of that name are to be found wherever a Cooper, or Cow-keeper, or a general dealer, (*Kooper*, Dutch,) took the name of his occupation, and transmitted it to his posterity.

² She must have been a person of some consideration, for in a deed preparatory to this marriage, her estates were conveyed in trust to the Lord Maltravers; John Bourchier, Lord Berners (the translator of Froissart); Sir John Audley, Lord Audley, and Thomas St. Leger, esquire of the king's body.

Sir William declared in that epitaph, he maintained in evil days ; during those days, he was imprisoned for his loyalty, in Ely House, with his eldest son : the son died under his confinement ; the father outlived his troubles, and " residing at his castle of Hertford, was famed for hospitality, charity, and other Christian virtues ; often visiting his poor neighbors, and relieving them in private, according to their necessities." He died in 1664, at the great age of eighty-two. His grandson and successor, Sir William, was father of the first Earl Cowper, lord chancellor, and of Spencer³ Cowper, one of the judges of the court of Common Pleas. John Cowper, D. D., chaplain to George II., rector of Great Berkhamstead, and father of the poet, was the judge's second son, by his first wife, Judith Pennington.

Dr. Cowper married Anne, daughter of Roger Donne, Esq. of Ludham Hall, in Norfolk ; Donne, whose name and deserts, if his own works were forgotten, would be preserved by Izaak Walton, was of the same family. Through the Hipposleys of Thoroughley in Sussex, and the Pellats of Bolney in the same county, this lady was "descended from the several noble houses of West, Knollys, Carey, Bullen, Howard, and Mowbray ; and so by four different lines from Henry III., king of England." "Distinctions of this nature," says the poet's friend and kinsman, Dr. Johnson, "can shed no additional lustre on the memory of Cowper ; yet genius, however exalted, disdains not, while it boasts not, the splendor of ancestry ; and royalty itself may be pleased, and perhaps benefited, by discovering its kindred to such piety, such purity, and such talents as his."

It is not, however, for her genealogy, however illustrious, that this lady is and will ever be remembered, but for being the mother of a poet who has embalmed her memory in everlasting verse. She died in 1737, at the age of thirty-four, in child-bed, leaving, of several children, only two sons. "I can truly say," said Cowper, nearly fifty years after her death, "that not a week passes (perhaps I might with equal veracity say a day) in which I do not think of

³ This is a family name, derived from the marriage of William Cowper with the daughter of Thomas Spencer, of St. Peter's, Cornhill, London, in the thirty-fourth of Henry VIII.

her : such was the impression her tenderness made upon me, though the opportunity she had for showing it was so short."

Mrs. Cowper was buried in the chancel of her husband's church, where a monument was erected to her, bearing this epitaph, which was composed by her niece, afterwards Lady Walsingham : —

Here lies, in early years bereft of life,
The best of mothers and the kindest wife ;
Who neither knew nor practised any art,
Secure in all she wished — her husband's heart.
Her love to him, still prevalent in death,
Prayed Heaven to bless him with her latest breath.

Still was she studious never to offend ;
And glad of an occasion to commend,
With ease would pardon injuries received,
Nor e'er was cheerful when another grieved ;
Despising state, with her own lot content,
Enjoyed the comforts of a life well-spent ;
Resigned, when Heaven demanded back, her breath,
Her mind heroic 'midst the pangs of death.

Whoe'er thou art that dost this tomb draw near,
O stay awhile, and shed a friendly tear !
These lines, though weak, are, as herself, sincere.

Cowper was old enough to feel his loss poignantly, and he has recorded his feelings on this occasion in the most beautiful of his minor poems.

My mother ! when I learned that thou wast dead,
Say, wast thou conscious of the tears I shed ?
Hovered thy spirit o'er thy sorrowing son, —
Wretch even then, life's journey just begun ?
Perhaps thou gav'st me, though unseen, a kiss,
Perhaps a tear, if souls can weep in bliss.
I heard the bell tolled on thy burial-day ;
I saw the hearse that bore thee slow away ;
And, turning from my nursery window, drew
A long, long sigh, and wept a last adieu.

He was old enough, too, if not to understand the greatness of his loss, to be made sensible of its immediate consequences, by being sent at six years of age from home to

a boarding-school, the first of those sad changes through which a gentle spirit has to pass in this uneasy and disordered world. His infancy is said to have been "delicate in no common degree," and his constitution to have discovered at a very early season its morbid tendency to diffidence, melancholy, and despair. Whatever may be the advantages of a school education for ordinary subjects, him was a case, both of body and mind, for which the peacefulness and security of home, and the constant tenderness of a wise and watchful mother, were peculiarly required. The school at which he was placed was at Market Street, in Hertfordshire, kept by a Dr. Pitman. The number of boys was considerable; and as in most institutions of this kind then, and in too many of them still, the most momentous part of education — that of moral discipline — seems to have been totally disregarded there.

"Here," says Cowper, "I had hardships of various kinds to conflict with, which I felt more sensibly in proportion to the tenderness with which I had been treated at home. But my chief affliction consisted in being singled out from all the other boys, by a lad of about fifteen years of age, as a proper object upon whom he might let loose the cruelty of his temper. I choose to conceal a particular recital of the many acts of barbarity with which he made it his business continually to persecute me. It will be sufficient to say, that his savage treatment of me impressed such a dread of his figure upon my mind, that I well remember being afraid to lift my eyes upon him higher than his knees; and that I knew him better by his shoe-buckles than by any other part of his dress. May the Lord pardon him, and may we meet in glory!

"One day, as I was sitting alone upon a bench in the school-room, melancholy, and almost ready to weep at the recollection of what I had already suffered, and expecting at the same time my tormentor every moment, the words of the Psalmist came into my mind, 'I will not fear what flesh can do unto me.' I applied them to my own case, with a degree of trust and confidence in God that would have been no disgrace to a much more experienced Christian. I instantly perceived in myself a briskness of

spirits and a cheerfulness I had never before experienced, and took several paces up and down the room with joyful alacrity — His gift in whom I trusted. But, alas! it was the first and last instance of this kind between infancy and manhood. The cruelty of this boy, which he had long practised in so secret a manner that no creature suspected it, was at length discovered; he was expelled the school,⁴ and I was taken from it."

The tyranny under which Cowper, for two years, suffered there, made, as it well might, a deep and lasting impression upon him; and to this it is that the strong dislike with which, in the latter part of his life, he regarded all schools, must be ascribed. I know not whether wicked propensities are ever cured at school; but this I know, that they generally find full play there; and that a system of preventive discipline which should impose some effectual restraint upon brutal dispositions, at that age when they are subject to control, would be one of the surest means of national reformation. It is needed alike for those who are being trained in our seminaries of sound and orthodox learning for the higher walks of life and the more important stations of society, and for those who are training themselves in the streets and purlieus of every populous place for transportation or the gallows.

When Cowper was removed from Dr. Pitman's, he was in some danger of losing his sight, specks having appeared on both eyes, which it was feared might cover them. He

⁴ In Cowper's account of his own early life, this school is said to have been in Bedfordshire; but Hayley says Hertfordshire, mentioning also the place and the name of the master; and as Cowper was only at one private school, subsequent biographers have properly followed Hayley. The mistake probably originated in the press, Cowper's own *Memoirs* having apparently been printed from an ill-written manuscript. Of this there is a whimsical proof, (p. 35,) where the *Persian Letters* of Montesquieu are spoken of, and the compositor, unable to decipher that author's name, has converted it into *Mules Quince*.

There are, however, two errors in this part of Hayley's account; he supposes that Cowper was probably removed from this school because of a complaint in his eyes, and he transfers the scene of his sufferings under a cruel boy to Westminster. I should not notice these, or any such mistakes, were it not to justify the difference in my own statement, which on both these points is drawn from Cowper's own memoir.

was therefore placed in the house of an eminent oculist, whose wife also had obtained great celebrity in the same branch of medical science. With them he remained two years, according to his own account, "to no good purpose;" yet it appears that the progress of the disease was stopped there, and that the great weakness of his eyes, with which he had previously been afflicted, must have been much relieved; for when he left their house, he was placed at Westminster school. He was then ten years old; at fourteen he was seized with the small-pox; he was severely handled by it, and in imminent danger; but this disease, he says, proved the best oculist; it removed the specks entirely. The eyes, however, still remained very liable to inflammation, and though this liability was afterwards much diminished, it continued in some degree as long as he lived. He was of opinion that it had been abated by the use of a hot foot-bath every night, the last thing before going to rest.⁵

In after years, when Cowper regarded with a diseased mind his own nature and the course of human life, he referred to his want of devotion during this illness, as showing that at that early age his heart had become proof against the ordinary means a gracious God employs for our chastisement. "Though I was severely handled," he says, "by this disease, and in imminent danger, yet neither in the course of it, nor during my recovery, had I any sentiments of contrition, any thought of God, or eternity. On the contrary, I was scarcely raised from the bed of pain and sickness, before the emotions of sin became more violent than ever, and the devil seemed rather to have gained, than lost, an advantage over me; so readily did I admit his suggestions, and so passive was I under them. By this time I

⁵ He relied, however, upon "Elliott's medicines," whatever they may have been. In a letter to Mr. Hill, (Nov. 1782,) he requests a supply of them, and says, "My eyes are in general better than I remember them to have been, since I first opened them upon this subluxary stage, which is now a little more than half a century ago; yet I do not think myself safe either without those remedies, or when, through long keeping, they have in part lost their virtue. I seldom use them without thinking of our trip to Maidenhead, where I first experienced their efficacy." — "Every time I feel the least uneasiness in either eye, I tremble lest, my *Æsculapius* being departed, my infallible remedy should be lost forever." (To the same, Dec. 7, 1782.)

became such an adept in the infernal art of lying, that I was seldom guilty of a fault for which I could not invent an apology capable of deceiving the wisest. These, I know, are called school-boys' tricks; but a total depravity of principle, and the work of the father of lies, are universally at the bottom of them."

A Roman Catholic is never likely to exaggerate either the sum or the character of his offences when he confesses them to his priest, because he knows that the rate of penance will be fixed in proportion; but in Protestant countries, both hypocrites and enthusiasts practise the same kind of exaggerated self-condemnation; the former because it is a part easily acted to deceive others, the latter because they deceive themselves, and think they are promoting the cause of religion while they magnify the miracle of their own conversion. Cowper was not one of those persons who gratify their spiritual pride by representing themselves as the vilest of sinners. Whatever he, in his deplorable state of mind, may have said or thought of his own childhood, it is certain that he had been an inoffensive, gentle boy. His temper was peculiarly mild and amiable, and his intimacies were formed with the most intellectual of his schoolfellows, — with those who afterwards distinguished themselves in life by their attainments and their talents; these are never the worst boys, — never those with whom a bad one becomes intimate. And when Cowper accused himself as a juvenile proficient in the "infernal art of lying," it may well be believed that he imposed upon himself in a far greater degree than he had ever imposed upon an usher, for lying is certainly not one of those vices which are either acquired or fostered at a public school.

"Religion," he says, "was neither known nor practised" in the family of the oculist with whom he was two years domesticated. Here, too, he seems to have looked back through the same distorting medium. His words can only mean that family prayers were not performed in that house. What the opinions of the family were, he could as little know as he was likely to inquire, farther than as to the place of worship which they frequented; and of their private devotions it was impossible that he could know any

thing. He proceeds to say, that whatever seeds of religion he might carry to Westminster, were all marred and corrupted there, before his seven years' apprenticeship to the classics was expired; that the duty of the schoolboy swallowed up every other, and that he acquired Latin and Greek at the expense of much more important knowledge.

It cannot be gainsaid that our boarding-schools are unfavorable to those devotional feelings, the seeds of which have been sown in early childhood, and destructive of those devotional habits which have been learned at home; that nothing which is not intentionally profane can be more irreligious than the forms of religion which are observed there, and that the attendance of schoolboys in a pack at public worship, is worse than perfunctory. This is one of the evils connected with public education, such as it long has been, still is, and is likely to continue, however earnestly endeavors may be made to amend it. It is a great evil; but Cowper did not reflect upon its natural and obvious causes, when he accounted for it by saying that the duty of the schoolboy swallowed up every other. In his days, and in my own, that duty left time enough for idleness, or recreation, or the pursuits of private study, to those who were studiously disposed: the *forcing system* had not been introduced. But at no time has a schoolboy's life offered any encouragement, any inducement, any opportunity, for devotion.

Much might be done to prevent or diminish the mischief incident to such institutions; but of all those mischiefs which are to be set against the great advantages belonging to them, this would be the most difficult to reach. In the natural course of human life, an intercourse is maintained between all the different grades from infancy to old age, and each in that intercourse exercises a salutary influence upon the others: in schools boys are brought together in great numbers, and kept together apart from all influences except that of mere authority. Theirs is the stage in which, in the wise order of things, the animal part of our nature predominates over the intellectual, and in a still greater degree over the spiritual; but something more than scholastic authority is required for counteracting the effect

of evil example, to which in such establishments they are inevitably exposed.

It appears from Cowper's own statement that the only part of religious instruction which fell within the province of the master was carefully inculcated. "That I may do justice," he says, "to the place of my education, I must relate one mark of religious discipline, which, in my time, was observed at Westminster; I mean the pains which Dr. Nichols took to prepare us for confirmation. The old man acquitted himself of this duty like one who had a deep sense of its importance; and I believe most of us were struck by his manner, and affected by his exhortations. Then, for the first time, I attempted to pray in secret; but being little accustomed to that exercise of the heart, and having very childish notions of religion, I found it a difficult and painful task, and was even then frightened at my own insensibility. This difficulty, though it did not subdue my good purposes till the ceremony of confirmation was passed, soon after entirely conquered them. I relapsed into a total forgetfulness of God, with all the disadvantages of being the more hardened, for being softened to no purpose."

What he remembered as the second instance of his serious impressions occurred while he was here at school. Crossing St. Margaret's churchyard late one evening, a glimmering light in the midst of it excited his curiosity, and, instead of quickening his speed, and whistling to keep his courage up the while, he went to see from whence it proceeded. A gravedigger was at work there by lantern-light; and just as Cowper came to the spot, he threw up a skull, which struck him on the leg. This gave an alarm to his conscience, and he remembered the incident as among the best religious documents which he received at Westminster. The impression, as might be expected, soon wore off. "I became," he says, "so forgetful of mortality, that, strange as it may seem, surveying my activity and strength, and observing the evenness of my pulse, I began to entertain, with no small complacency, a notion that perhaps I might never die." Death, indeed, appears to us in boyhood almost as much like a dream, as life to those who are far advanced upon their mortal pilgrimage. This, however, was a very

short-lived notion ; for, he continues, "I was soon after struck with a lowness of spirits, uncommon at that age, and had frequently intimations of a consumptive habit. I had skill enough to understand their meaning, but could never prevail upon myself to disclose them to any one, for I thought every bodily infirmity a disgrace, especially a consumption. This messenger of the Lord, however, did his errand, and perfectly convinced me I was mortal."

The symptoms of consumption were no doubt as completely fanciful as the total depravity at the same age of which he afterwards accused himself. The ailments must have been very slight which were not perceived by others, and which did not prevent him from excelling at cricket and foot-ball. It has been said that the treatment he endured at Westminster in all probability produced his insuperable aversion to public schools. But that aversion arose from what he saw and what he reflected on in after life, not from any ill usage which he experienced there. His recollections of Westminster were pleasurable. In one of his letters he says, "He who cannot look forward with comfort, must find what comfort he can in looking backward. Upon this principle I the other day sent my imagination upon a trip thirty years behind me. She was very obedient, and very swift of foot, presently performed her journey, and at last set me down in the sixth form at Westminster. I fancied myself once more a schoolboy, a period of life in which, if I had never tasted true happiness, I was at least equally⁶ unacquainted with its contrary. No manufacturer of waking dreams ever succeeded better in his employment than I do; I can weave such a piece of tapestry in a few minutes as not only has all the charms of reality, but is embellished also with a variety of beauties, which, though they never existed, are more captivating than any that ever did. Accordingly

⁶ So completely is the statement contradicted that the cruelty which he underwent at Westminster "produced an indelible recollection upon his mind through life," that it "affords, in part, the clew by which his future circumstances are to be explained;" and that occasional symptoms of derangement in his early youth may, in some measure, be ascribed to the same cause." This is affirmed in the 'brief memoirs of Cowper, revised and recommended by Mr. Greatheed.'

I was a schoolboy in high favor with the master, received a silver groat for my exercise, and had the pleasure of seeing it sent from form to form⁷ for the admiration of all who were able to understand it."⁸

This passage alone might prove that the strong disapprobation of public schools which Cowper expresses in his poems was not occasioned by any unhappiness that he had suffered at Westminster. Even when describing most forcibly the evils and dangers connected with them, he draws a picture which shows with how much pleasure he looked back upon that part of his boyhood.

Be it a weakness, it deserves some praise,
We love the play-place of our early days;
The scene is touching, and the heart is stone
That feels not at that sight, and feels at none.
The wall on which we tried our graving skill,
The very name we carved subsisting still;
The bench on which we sat while deep employed;
Though mangled, hacked, and hewed, not yet destroyed;
The little ones, unbuttoned, glowing hot,
Playing our games, and on the very spot,
As happy as we once to kneel and draw
The chalky ring, and knuckle-down at taw;
To pitch the ball into the grounded hat,
Or drive it devious with a dexterous pat;
The pleasing spectacle at once excites
Such recollection of our own delights,

⁷ This custom was not practised at Westminster in the days of Dr. Vincent. But "sweet remuneration" was still dispensed in silver pence; and those pence produced still "goodlier guerdon," by an established rate of exchange at which the mistress of the boarding-house received them, and returned current coin in the proportion of six to one. My first literary profits were thus obtained, and, like Cowper, I remember the pleasure with which I received them. But there was this difference, that his rewards were probably for Latin verse, in which he excelled, and mine were always for English composition. Cowper alludes to these words in his *Table-Talk* :—

At Westminster, where little poets strive
To set a distich upon six and five,
Where discipline helps opening buds of sense,
And makes his pupils proud with silver pence,
I was a poet too.

⁸ He adds, "Do you wish to see this highly-applauded performance? It follows on the other side." Whatever it was, it had been torn off from the letter, and has perished. This is to be regretted; for whether in prose or verse, it would have been a cheerful sketch of his boyhood.

That-viewing it we seem almost to obtain
 Our innocent, sweet, simple years again.
 This fond attachment to the well-known place
 Where first we started into life's long race,
 Maintains its hold with such unfailling sway,
 We feel it e'en in age, and at our latest day.*

So far indeed were the years which Cowper passed at Westminster from being years of misery, that they were probably the happiest in his life. They were years in which he was not disquieted with any foresight of the obstacles which afterwards impeded his happiness; neither had he any cause, real or imaginary, for regret, or self-reproach. He was exactly one of those boys who choose for themselves the good that may be gained at a public school, and eschew the evil, being preserved from it by their good instincts, or by the influence of virtuous principles inculcated in childhood. Being equally fond of his studies and his sports, he was a proficient in both. "When I was a boy," he says in one of his letters, "I excelled at cricket and foot-ball; but the fame I acquired by achievements that way is long since forgotten, and I do not know that I have made a figure in any thing else." The first volume of his poems was in the press when that sentence was written; and the figure which he soon afterwards made in the field of literature showed the benefit which he had derived.¹⁰ both from the discipline of Westminster and its indiscipline,—from the instruction which a man of genius willingly imparts to an apt and docile pupil in the regular course of school-business; and from that play and exercise of the intellect, which, in the little less profitable hours of school-idleness, he enjoyed with those schoolfellows who may properly be called his peers, Lloyd, Churchill, and Colman.

* *Tirocinium.*

¹⁰ "Men who are partial to public schools," says Hayley, "will probably doubt if any system of private tuition could have proved more favorable to the future display of his genius than such an education as he received at Westminster. There, indeed, the peculiar delicacy of his nature might expose him to an extraordinary portion of present discomfort; yet he undoubtedly acquired the accomplishment and the reputation of scholarship, with the advantage of being known and esteemed by some aspiring youths of his own age, who were destined to become conspicuous and powerful in the splendid scene of the world."

Among his other contemporaries at Westminster who distinguished themselves in after life, were Cumberland,¹¹ Impey, and Hastings; for the latter he had a particular value. His favorite school friend is said to have been Sir William Russell, the representative of a family often allied by intermarriages¹² with the Cromwells. This is the friend to whom Cowper alludes in some of the earliest of his verses which have been preserved —

Still, still, I mourn with each returning day
Him snatched by fate in early youth away.

In a letter wherein Cowper delivers a strong opinion against public education, he says, "Connections formed at school are said to be lasting, and often beneficial. There are two or three stories of this kind upon record, which would not be so constantly cited as they are whenever this subject happens to be mentioned, if the chronicle that preserves their remembrance had many besides to boast of. For my own part, I found such friendship, though warm enough in the commencement, surprisingly liable to extinction; and of seven or eight whom I had selected for intimates, out of about three hundred, in ten years' time, not one was left me." This was written in a splenetic mood, induced perhaps by the neglect of some who, if they were men of letters, were also, in the worst acceptance of the phrase, men of the world. Some of his early intimates he had at that time lost by death; and the circumstances which drove him into retirement separated him from others, of

¹¹ "Cumberland and I," he says, "boarded together in the same house at Westminster. He was at that time clever, and I suppose has given proof sufficient to the world that he is still clever; but of all that he has written, it has never fallen in my way to read a syllable, except perhaps in a magazine or review, the sole sources at present of all my intelligence." This was written in 1788.

¹² One of this family was bedchamber-woman to the Princess Amelia; and Mr. Noble relates what he calls a most excellent anecdote of her. "Frederick, the then Prince of Wales, came into the room on the 30th of January, when she was adjusting some part of the princess's dress. 'Ah! Miss Russell,' said he, 'are you not at church to endeavor to avert the judgments of Heaven from falling upon the nation for the sins of your ancestor Oliver?' To which she instantly replied, 'Is it not humiliation enough for a descendant of the great Cromwell to be pinning up the tail of your sister?'"

whom, nevertheless, he continued to think with kindness and affection — this too in cases when he must strongly and justly have condemned the course of their lives. And in one instance that which had been no more than an acquaintance at school ripened, after an interval of many years, into esteem and friendship.

When his intention of publishing a translation of Homer was made known, and Lord Dartmouth on that occasion recalled himself to his recollection as an old schoolfellow who took a friendly interest in his success, Cowper felt for how much intellectual wealth he was indebted to that sound learning which he had brought from school. "When his lordship and I," said he, "sat side by side in the sixth form at Westminster, we little thought that in process of time one of us was ordained to give a new translation of Homer; yet at that very time it seems I was laying the foundation of this superstructure."

CHAPTER II.

COWPER IN A SOLICITOR'S OFFICE, AND IN THE TEMPLE. FIRST INDICATIONS OF A DISEASED MIND. HIS EARLY FRIENDS. THURLOW. HILL. THE NONSENSE CLUB.

"AT the age of eighteen," says Cowper, "being tolerably well furnished with grammatical knowledge, but as ignorant of all kinds of religion as the satchel at my back, I was taken from Westminster; and having spent about nine months at home, was sent to acquire the practice of the law with an attorney." This is said in that memoir of a certain part of his life which was published several years after his death, as "detailing particularly the exercises of his mind in regard to religion; and as eminently calculated to benefit those who are laboring under a depression of mind arising from similar causes, to promote the interests of evangelical religion, and to vindicate the character of the 'Christian Poet' from the unjust and illiberal insinuations, not of

his enemies, for he had none, but of the enemies of our adorable Redeemer!"

The state of mind in which he composed this brief memoir is indicated by its exaggerated language upon this point. Speaking of himself elsewhere in a calmer strain, he says, "At that time I valued a man according to his proficiency and taste in classical literature, and had the meanest opinion of all other accomplishments unaccompanied by that. I lived to see the vanity of what I had made my pride; and in a few years found that there were other attainments which would carry a man more handsomely through life than a mere knowledge of what Homer and Virgil had left behind them. In measure as my attachment to these gentry wore off, I found a more welcome reception among those whose acquaintance it was more my interest to cultivate. But all this time was spent in painting a piece of wood that had no life in it. At last I began to think *indeed*; I found myself in possession of many bawbles, but not one grain of solidity in all my treasures."¹

Having fixed on the law for his study, or the law having been fixed on for him, he was articled for three years to a Mr. Chapman, and resided with him during that time. "Here," he says, "I might have lived and died without seeing or hearing any thing that might remind me of one single Christian duty, had it not been that I was at liberty to spend my leisure hours (which were well nigh all my time) at my aunt's, in Southampton Row. By this means I had opportunity of seeing the inside of a church, whither I went with the family on Sundays, and which probably I should otherwise never have seen."² He seems not to have considered that as he passed his Sunday regularly with a family that was nearly related to him, his master might well think himself under no responsibility for the manner in which he discharged the duties of the day.

The transition from the sixth form in Westminster to a solicitor's office, was likely to be as great, and as little agreeable, in the point of society, as of the employment to be pursued there. He had, however, for fellow-clerk, no

¹ Letter to Mr. Newton, Feb. 18, 1781.

² Memoir, p. 19.

less a person than the after Lord Chancellor Thurlow, who had been educated at Canterbury school. Dr. Donne, one of the prebendaries of that cathedral, had a quarrel with Mr. Talbot, the then head master of the school, and he is said to have brought young Thurlow out of Suffolk and placed him there, as a daring, refractory, clever boy, who would be sure to torment his master.³ This charitable intention was perfectly fulfilled, but the primary purpose of making the boy a good scholar was equally accomplished; for Thurlow was one of those persons who have the rare power of doing much while they seem to be doing nothing. There was no similarity of disposition between these youths; but there was enough of intellectual sympathy to produce at least the appearance of friendship, and on one part certainly the reality for a time. Cowper introduced his new associate to his aunt's house. Writing to Lady Hesketh many years afterwards, and reminding her of those days, he says, "I did actually live three years with Mr. Chapman, a solicitor, that is to say, I slept three years in his house; but I lived, that is to say, I spent my days, in Southampton Row, as you very well remember. There was I and the future Lord Chancellor, constantly employed, from morning to night, in giggling and making giggle, instead of studying the law. O fie, cousin! how could you do so?"

It is evident from this account that Cowper's condition during those years could not have been, as Hayley supposed, peculiarly irksome to his delicate feelings; and that there is no ground for assuming that it tended to promote rather than to counteract his constitutional tendency to melancholy: no such tendency had at that time manifested itself, and it has too hastily been said that the law was chosen for him without the slightest regard to his fitness or inclination. The motives for the choice are evident; his connections were such, that there was a sure prospect of his being well provided for in this profession; and he had given proof at

³ I am obliged to Sir Egerton Brydges for this and some other anecdotes in this volume. Thurlow's father, he adds, was a neighbor of Dr. Donne's, and he supposes Donne to have been related to Cowper's mother.

Westminster of two of its essential qualifications — talents and diligence. The opinion that he was entirely unfitted for it by nature he sometimes entertained in after life, but it was when he considered himself as equally unfitted for any other calling. "What nature," says he, "expressly designed me for, I have never been able to conjecture, I seem to myself so universally disqualified for the common and customary occupations and amusements of mankind." At other times, he took blame to himself, and imputed no fault to nature. Writing to a young friend who was then studying the law, he says to him, "You do well, my dear sir, to improve your opportunity; to speak in the rural phrase, this is your sowing time, and the sheaves you look for can never be yours, unless you make that use of it. The color of our whole life is generally such as the three or four first years in which we are our own masters, make it. Then it is that we may be said to shape our own destiny, and to treasure up for ourselves a series of future successes or disappointments. Had I employed my time as wisely as you, in a situation very similar to yours, I had never been a poet perhaps, but I might by this time have acquired a character of more importance in society; and a situation in which my friends would have been better pleased to see me. But three years misspent in an attorney's office were, almost of course, followed by several more equally misspent in the Temple; and the consequence has been, as the Italian epitaph says, '*Sto qui*;' (here I am!) The only use I can make of myself now, at least the best, is to serve *in terrorem* to others, when occasion may happen to offer, that they may escape (as far as my admonitions can have any weight with them) my folly and my fate."⁴

He had been entered at the Middle Temple (April 29, 1749) before he left school; and upon leaving the solicitor's office in his twenty-first year, and becoming, as he says, in a manner, complete master of himself, he took chambers there in 1752. And here, when he first began to live alone, that malady began, which at different times, and

⁴ To Mr. Unwin, May, 1781.

⁵ To Samuel Rose, Esq. July 23, 1789.

under different symptoms, darkened so much of his life. Its commencement he has thus described in his own melancholy Memoirs.

“ I was struck, not long after my settlement in the Temple, with such a dejection of spirits, as none but they who have felt the same can have the least conception of. Day and night I was upon the rack, lying down in horror, and rising up in despair. I presently lost all relish for those studies to which I had before been closely attached; the classics had no longer any charms for me; I had need of something more salutary than amusement, but I had no one to direct me where to find it.

“ At length I met with Herbert’s Poems; and Gothic and uncouth as they were, I yet found in them a strain of piety which I could not but admire. This was the only author I had any delight in reading. I pored over him all day long; and though I found not here, what I might have found, a cure for my malady, yet it never seemed so much alleviated as while I was reading *him*. At length I was advised by a very near and dear relative, to lay him aside; for he thought such an author more likely to nourish my disorder than to remove it.

“ In this state of mind I continued near a twelvemonth; when, having experienced the inefficacy of all human means, I at length betook myself to God in prayer: such is the rank which our Redeemer holds in our esteem, never resorted to but in the last instance, when all creatures have failed to succor us. My hard heart was at length softened; and my stubborn knees brought to bow. I composed a set of prayers, and made frequent use of them. Weak as my faith was, the Almighty, who will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax, was graciously pleased to hear me.

“ A change of scene was recommended to me, and I embraced an opportunity of going with some friends to Southampton, where I spent several months. Soon after our arrival, we walked to a place called Freemantle, about a mile from the town; the morning was clear and calm; the sun shone bright upon the sea; and the country on the borders of it was the most beautiful I had ever seen. We

sat down upon an eminence, at the end of that arm of the sea, which runs between Southampton and the New Forest. Here it was that on a sudden, as if another sun had been kindled that instant in the heavens, on purpose to dispel sorrow and vexation of spirit, I felt the weight of all my misery taken off; my heart became light and joyful in a moment; I could have wept with transport had I been alone. I must needs believe that nothing less than the Almighty *fiat* could have filled me with such inexpressible delight; not by a gradual dawning of peace, but as it were with a flash of his life-giving countenance. I think I remember something like a glow of gratitude to the Father of mercies, for this unexpected blessing, and that I ascribed it to his gracious acceptance of my prayers. But Satan, and my own wicked heart, quickly persuaded me that I was indebted for my deliverance to nothing but a change of scene, and the amusing varieties of the place. By this means he turned the blessing into a poison; teaching me to conclude that nothing but a continued circle of diversion, and indulgence of appetite, could secure me from a relapse.

“Upon this hellish principle, as soon as I returned to London, I burnt my prayers, and away went all thoughts of devotion and dependence upon God my Savior. Surely it was of his mercy that I was not consumed; glory be to his grace!”

This instantaneous transition from deep and morbid melancholy, to a state of genial feeling, has been represented as a providential dispensation—a gracious call; and undoubtedly Cowper regarded it in that light when he drew up the narrative of his own mental sufferings. But the accuracy with which such cases are described may be sometimes questioned, even when, as in this instance, the sincerity of the individual is unquestionable. Present feeling gives a coloring to the past; and it is not more difficult for a painter in middle age to paint his own portrait from a looking-glass, not as he sees himself there, but as he was in his youth, than it is to represent faithfully an evanescent state of feeling, after an interval of many years.

It is remarkable that, often as his sea-side recollections occur in Cowper's correspondence, he never alludes to this

peculiar incident, not even when speaking of the very scene, to the very person for whom, and at whose especial request, there is reason to believe this narrative was written. "I remember Southampton well," he says to Mr. Newton, "having spent much time there; but though I was young, and had no objections on the score of conscience either to dancing or cards, I never was in the assembly-room in my life. I never was fond of company, and especially disliked it in the country. A walk to Netley Abbey, or to Freemantle, or to Redbridge, or a book by the fireside, had always more charms for me than any other amusement that the place afforded. I was also a sailor, and being of Sir Thomas Hesketh's party, who was himself born one, was often pressed into the service. But though I gave myself an air and wore trousers, I had no genuine right to that honor, disliking much to be occupied in great waters, unless in the finest weather. How they contrive to elude the wearisomeness that attends a sea life, who take long voyages, you know better than I; but for my own part, I seldom have sailed so far as from Hampton river to Portsmouth, without feeling the confinement irksome, and sometimes to a degree that was almost insupportable. There is a certain perverseness, of which I believe all men have a share, but of which no man has a larger share than I; I mean that temper, or humor, or whatever it is to be called, that indisposes us to a situation, though not unpleasant in itself, merely because we cannot get out of it. I could not endure the room in which I now write, were I conscious that the door were locked. In less than five minutes I should feel myself a prisoner, though I can spend hours in it, under an assurance that I may leave it when I please, without experiencing any tedium at all. It was for this reason, I suppose, that the yacht was always disagreeable to me. Could I have stepped out of it into a cornfield or a garden, I should have liked it well enough; but being surrounded with water, I was as much confined in it as if I had been surrounded by fire, and did not find that it made me any adequate compensation for such an abridgment of my liberty. I make little doubt but Noah was glad when he was enlarged from the ark; and we are sure that Jonah

was when he came out of the fish ; and so was I to escape from the good sloop the *Harriet*."

On the 14th of June, 1754, Cowper was called to the bar ; that he had taken no pains to qualify himself for his profession is certain, and it is probable that he had as little intention as inclination to pursue it, resting in indolent reliance upon his patrimonial means, and in the likely expectation that some official appointment would be found for him in good time.

One of his then familiar friends describes the society in which Cowper was placed, in no flattering colors. "The Temple," says he, "is the barrier that divides the city and suburbs ; and the gentlemen who reside there seem influenced by the situation of the place they inhabit. Templars are in general a kind of citizen courtiers. They aim at the air and mien of the drawing-room ; but the holiday smartness of a 'prentice, heightened with some additional touches of the rake or coxcomb, betrays itself in every thing they do. The Temple, however, is stocked with its peculiar beaux, wits, poets, critics, and every character in the gay world ; and it is a thousand pities that so pretty a society should be disgraced with a few dull fellows, who can submit to puzzle themselves with cases and reports, and have not taste enough to follow the genteel method of studying the law."⁶

In 1756 he lost his father. "At that time I was young," he says,⁷ "too young to have reflected much. It had never occurred to me that a parson has no fee-simple in the house and glebe he occupies. There was neither tree, nor gate, nor stile, in all that country, to which I did not feel a relation, and the house itself I preferred to a palace. I was sent for from London to attend him in his last illness, and he died just before I arrived. Then, and not till then, I felt for the first time, that I and my native place were disunited forever ; I sighed a long adieu to fields and woods, from which I once thought I never should be parted, and was at no time so sensible of their beauties, as just when I left them all behind me, to return no more."

⁶ Connoisseur, No. 1.

⁷ Letter to Mr. Rose, Oct. 19, 1787.

Three years after his father's death,⁸ he removed from the Middle to the Inner Temple, and purchased chambers⁹ there, in an airy situation. About this time he was made a Commissioner of Bankrupts; but he was more employed with literature than law, and perhaps more with love than literature. He had fixed his affections on one of those cousins with whom he and Thurlow used to giggle and make giggle in Southampton Row—Theodora Jane, second daughter of his uncle, Ashley Cowper. She was an accomplished woman, her person elegant, and her understanding more than ordinarily good. Attachments formed under such circumstances, when the parties may almost be said to have grown up together, take root before they are suspected on either side. The first effect upon him was to produce a change in his manners, of which he was himself conscious; he lost that uncomfortable bashfulness, for which, in dispositions resembling his, a public school affords no cure; he paid some attention to his dress, ventured to bear a part in general conversation, and sometimes endeavored to distinguish himself in it.¹⁰ When the lady's father perceived their mutual inclination, he objected to it at first, on the score of want of means, and said to his daughter, "If you marry William Cowper, what will you do?" "Do, sir?" she replied; "wash all day, and ride out on the great dog at night!" Such an answer rather indicated a light spirit and a playful temper, than the deep affection which was really felt, and which, when it had been rendered hopeless, was faithfully retained through life. For when the passion became more serious, Mr. Ashley Cowper refused his consent, upon the ground that marriage was improper between persons so nearly

⁸ Mr. Cowper had married a second wife, who survived him. She is mentioned but once in Cowper's Correspondence, and that only incidentally, but so as to show that a not unfrequent intercourse was kept up between them. In a letter to Mr. Hill, he says, "I shall possibly now and then desire you to call at the seed-shop in your way to Westminster, through sparingly. Should I do it often, you would begin to think you had a mother-in-law at Berkhamstead."—Private Corr i. 18.

⁹ They cost him two hundred and fifty pounds.

¹⁰ This account he gives in one of his early poems, entitled "Of Himself."

related. This opinion is one of the few Romish superstitions that have survived the Reformation. But though, as a general principle, it is a mere superstition, introduced by a crafty priesthood as one means for extending the power and increasing the wealth of a corrupt and profligate church, such marriages must ever be regarded as ill-omened in cases where there is an hereditary tendency to any mortal or miserable disease. There is no reason for supposing that any such tendency existed in this case; but Mr. Ashley Cowper may very probably have seen in the state of mind into which his nephew had fallen soon after he removed to the Temple, unequivocal symptoms of the affliction which afterwards befell him.

It is said that though thus "frustrated in their wishes, the cousins did not cease to love, nor occasionally to meet," and that, though Theodora deemed herself bound in duty to obey her father's will in this the most important of all earthly concerns, Cowper still hoped to overcome an objection which appeared to him unreasonable, because he was not conscious, and could not be told, wherein its strength consisted. The intercourse seems to have ceased when he understood that the father's determination was unalterable, and he then expressed his feelings in verses, which were sent in a letter to Theodora's sister, Lady Hesketh. The letter has perished, but the verses were preserved in her memory.

Doomed, as I am, in solitude to waste
The present moments, and regret the past;
Deprived of every joy I valued most,
My friend torn from me, and my mistress lost;
Call not this gloom I wear, this anxious mien,
The dull effect of humor, or of spleen!
Still, still, I mourn, with each returning day,
Him¹¹ snatched, by fate, in early youth away;
And her — through tedious years of doubt and pain,
Fixed in her choice, and faithful — but in vain.
O prone to pity, generous, and sincere,
Whose eye ne'er yet refused the wretch a tear;
Whose heart the real claim of friendship knows,
Nor thinks a lover's are but fancied woes;

¹¹ Sir William Russel, the favorite friend of the young poet.

See me, ere yet my distant course half done,
 Cast forth a wanderer on a wild unknown!
 See me neglected on the world's rude coast,
 Each dear companion of my voyage lost!
 Nor ask why clouds of sorrow shade my brow,
 And ready tears wait only leave to flow;
 Why all that soothes a heart from anguish free,
 All that delights the happy, palls with me!

From that time Cowper and the cousin whom he had loved so dearly never met again. Many years afterward, when his intimacy with Lady Hesketh was renewed, he said to her, "I still look back to the memory of your sister, and regret her; but how strange it is, if we were to meet now, we should not know each other!" The effect on Theodora was more durable. Neither time nor absence diminished her attachment to the object of her first and only love; the poems which, while their intercourse continued, he had transcribed for her as they were composed, she carefully preserved during many years; and then, for reasons known only to herself, sent them in a sealed packet to a lady, her particular friend, with directions not to be opened till after her decease. His death perhaps, or the hopeless state into which he had sunk, rendered the sight of these relics too painful; and hoping that they might one day be incorporated¹² (as they now are) with those works which will perpetuate her beloved cousin's name, she put it out of her own power to burn them in any darker mood of mind. Often as there is cause to censure the want of judgment and of feeling with which posthumous writings have been published, there is more reason to regret the rashness and the carelessness with which precious papers have been destroyed.

¹² They were printed in a small volume, with the following title: — "Poems, the Early Productions of William Cowper; now first published from the originals, in the possession of James Croft, with anecdotes of the Poet, collected from letters of Lady Hesketh, written during her residence at Olney. London, 1825."

Mr. Croft says, in his Preface, that "Miss Cowper's death took place on the 22d of last October, (1824,) and her friend having died a short time previous to that event, her executors sent the packet to me, with other articles, according to the direction of that lady."

The copyright of this volume has been purchased for the present edition of Cowper's Works.

The depression of spirits which compelled Cowper to give up his professional pursuits, and continued at times to affect him through life, has been supposed to have been partly produced by this disappointment.¹³ But melancholy madness, which in women so often originates in love, or takes its type from it, is seldom found to proceed from that passion, or assume its character in men. Cowper's morbid feelings, when he began to brood over them, were of a totally different kind, and there is not the slightest allusion to this disappointment in his account of his own mental sufferings. He speaks there of his twelve years in the Temple, as having been "spent in an uninterrupted course of sinful indulgence;" and though assuredly in such words, so used by one in his state of mind, more — much more — "meets the ear" than "is meant," it may safely be inferred from them that no great part of that time was rendered unhappy by this cause. This, indeed, is placed beyond a doubt by a letter written in Latin¹⁴ to his friend and fellow Templar, Mr. Clotworthy Rowley, then upon the circuit in Ireland.

"While you," he says, "are following your Rhadamanthus with more pains, as you tell me, than profit, I, who neither take pains nor hope for profit, am leading an idle, and therefore what is to me a most agreeable life; nor do I envy you the country, dirty as it now is, and daily deluged with unseasonable rain. Sometimes, indeed, I go into the adjacent parts of the country, to visit a friend or a lady; but it is a short journey, and such as may easily be performed on foot, or in a hired carriage, for never, unless compelled to do it, do I mount a horse, because I have a tender skin, which with little exercise of that kind suffers sorely. I lately passed three days at Greenwich; a blessed three days, and if they had been three years I should not have envied the gods their immortality. There I found that lovely and beloved little girl, of whom I have often talked to you; she is at that age, sixteen, at which every day brings with it some new beauty to her form. No one

¹³ Mr. Croft's preface.

¹⁴ Aug. 1758. The original will be found among the supplementary notes.

can be more modest, nor (which seems wonderful in a woman) more silent; but when she speaks, you might believe that a Muse was speaking. Woe is me that so bright a star looks to another region; having risen in the West Indies, thither it is about to return, and will leave me nothing but sighs and tears."

Without supposing that there was any thing serious in this attachment, we may believe that he would not have thus spoken of it, nor allowed it to enter his fancy, unless he had entirely overcome his former disappointment. On both occasions he found amusement, and perhaps, as in later years, relief, by employing himself in light literature.

The power of versifying is sometimes hereditary; but far less frequently than a musical ear, or the painter's accuracy of eye and dexterity of hand, all which depend more evidently upon organic aptitude. Cowper's father, his uncle Ashley, and his brother, all wrote verses. He himself had been "a dabbler in rhyme," he said, ever since he was fourteen years of age, when he began with translating an elegy of Tibullus. The earliest of his compositions that has been preserved is an imitation of the *Splendid Shilling*, written at Bath, in 1748, on finding the heel of a shoe; he was then in his seventeenth year; and the diction and versification are such that no one would suppose it to have been a juvenile production. During his residence in the Temple, where, "according to his colloquial account, he rambled," says Hayley, "from the thorny road of jurisprudence into the primrose paths of literature and poetry, even then his native diffidence confined him to social and subordinate exertions; and though he wrote and printed both verse and prose, it was as the concealed assistant¹⁵ of less diffident authors."

He belonged at that time to the Nonsense Club, consisting of seven Westminster men, who dined together every

¹⁵ In the *Monthly Review* for September, 1759, William Cowper, Esq. is mentioned as one of the assistants of the Duncombes in the translation of Horace. But W. C. Esq. is also mentioned, and the initials are more likely to designate him at that time than the name at length. It is remarkable that both should occur in a list of only four names.

Thursday. Bonnell Thornton, Colman, Lloyd, and Joseph Hill were members ; the latter no otherwise known than as having been Cowper's correspondent and constant friend through life ; but this is to be well known. He was a man of playful talent, as well as solid practical sense. To him it is that Cowper says, looking back over an interval of more than thirty years,¹⁶ " The noble institution of the Nonsense Club will be forgotten, when we are gone who composed it ; but I often think of your most heroic line, written at one of our meetings, and especially think of it when I am translating Homer :

To whom replied the Devil yard-long-tailed.

There was never any thing more truly Grecian than that triple epithet ; and were it possible to introduce it into either Iliad or Odyssey, I should certainly steal it."

But Hill had other sympathies with Cowper than those which grew out of school-fellowship, and were merely intellectual. He was a friend for all weathers ; one with whom the pleasurable excitement of conversation might be enjoyed, but in whose presence also an inclination for silence might be indulged. The heart had little share in the intimacy between Cowper and the other members of the club ; — Hill's was a cordial friendship. They had the same taste for quiet enjoyment. Hill, though he afterwards applied himself drudgingly and successfully to the law, allowed himself in those years wholesome intervals of recreation in the country, where he used to " read upon sunshiny banks, and contemplate the clouds as he lay upon his back." Long after, when he had become a man of business in his habits, Cowper, writing¹⁷ to him at his country-seat, says, " I greet you at your castle of Buen Retiro, and wish you could enjoy the unmixed pleasures of the country there ; but it seems you are obliged to dash the cup with a portion of those bitters you are always swallowing in town. Well — you are honorably and usefully employed ; and ten times more beneficially to society, than if you were piping to a few sheep under a spreading

¹⁶ June 9, 1786.

¹⁷ Aug. 10, 1780.

beech, or listening to a tinkling rill. Besides, by the effect of long custom and habitual practice, you are not only enabled to endure your occupation, but even find it agreeable. I remember the time when it would not have suited you so well, to have devoted so large a part of your vacation to the objects of your profession; and you, I dare say, have not forgot what a seasonable relaxation you found, when, lying at full stretch upon the ruins of an old wall, by the seaside, you amused yourself with Tasso's Jerusalem, and the Pastor Fido. I recollect that we both pitied Mr. De Grey, when we called at his cottage at Taplow, and found, not the master indeed, but his desk, with his white-leaved folio upon it, which bespoke him as much a man of business in his retirement as in Westminster Hall. But by these steps he ascended the bench. Now he may read what he pleases, and ride where he will, if the gout will give him leave. And you, who have no gout, and probably never will, when your hour of dismissal comes, will, for that reason, if for no other, be a happier man than he."

Cowper was at this time fond of moving about; this, however, was rather the restlessness of a highly sensitive nature, than the activity of a healthful one; though he delighted in rural scenery, he never seems to have made any exertion for the sake of enjoying it, and he did not think the most splendid spectacle that the metropolis can afford, and which it afforded but once in the course of his life, worth the little trouble that it would have cost him to behold it. Hill had the same indifference for such things, and they both manifested it at the coronation of George III. When Hill's sisters obtained, by Ashley Cowper's favor, a good situation for seeing that solemnity, neither their brother nor Cowper would accompany them; and when they returned, full of delight and admiration, "Well, ladies," exclaimed Hill, and Cowper joined him in the exclamation, "I am glad you were so pleased, though you have sat up all night for it!" At the illumination for the king's recovery, in 1789, these ladies, who were then "the old Mrs. Hills," retained with their youthful spirits the same passion for sights; and having in vain asked their brother to accompany them, they set out and traversed the streets

that night to see what could be seen. When they returned to their brother's house in Saville Row, he greeted them with, "Well, ladies, I am glad you were so pleased." They laughed, and replied, "Why, this is just what you said to us thirty years ago!"

The incurious temper which equally characterized Cowper and his friend, was strangely combined in the former with a physical restlessness, which, till he was more than thirty years old, made it almost essential to his comfort to be perpetually in motion.¹⁸ This, which disqualified him for the practical labors of the desk, must have disinclined him from the sedentary study of his profession, and might possibly have disabled him for it, if he had otherwise been willing to have applied himself seriously thereto. Thurlow, meantime, who, with a strong head and strong body, possessed also an invincible strength of purpose, applied himself determinately to the business of life. One evening they were drinking tea together at a lady's house in Bloomsbury, when Cowper, — contrasting in melancholy foresight his own conduct and consequent prospects with those of his fellow-idler and giggler in former days, — said to him, "Thurlow, I am nobody, and shall be always nobody, and you will be chancellor. You shall provide for me when you are!" He smiled, and replied, "I surely will." "These ladies," said Cowper, "are witnesses!" The future chancellor still smiled, and answered, "Let them be so, for I will certainly do it."¹⁹

This conversation occurred in 1762. A letter of Cowper's, written in the same year, shows in what state of mind he then regarded his own situation.²⁰

TO CLOTWORTHY ROWLEY, ESQ. AT TENDRING HALL,
NEAR IPSWICH.

DEAR ROWLEY,

Your letter has taken me just in the crisis; to-morrow I set off for Brighthelmston, and there I stay till the winter

¹⁸ Private Corr. i. 353.

¹⁹ Hayley, ii. 166.

²⁰ This very curious and characteristic letter, which (except a Latin one already noticed, and addressed to the same friend) is the earliest of Cowper's that has yet appeared, is now for the first time published

brings us all to town again. This world is a shabby fellow, and uses us ill ; but a few years hence there will no difference between us and our fathers of the tenth generation upwards. I could be as splenetick as you, and with more reason, if I thought proper to indulge that humor ; but my resolution is, (and I would advise you to adopt it,) never to be melancholy while I have a hundred pounds in the world to keep up my spirits. God knows how long that will be ; but in the mean time *Io Triumphe!* If a great man struggling with misfortunes is a noble object, a little man that despises them is no contemptible one ; and this is all the philosophy I have in the world at present. It savors pretty much of the ancient Stoic ; but till the Stoics became coxcombs, they were, in my opinion, a very sensible sect.

If my resolution to be a great man was half so strong as it is to despise the shame of being a little one, I should not despair of a house in Lincoln's Inn Fields, with all its appurtenances ; for there is nothing more certain, and I could prove it by a thousand instances, than that every man may be rich if he will. What is the industry of half the industrious men in the world but avarice ? and call it by which name you will, it almost always succeeds. But this provokes me, that a covetous dog who will work by candle-light in a morning, to get what he does not want, shall be praised for his thriftiness, while a gentleman shall be abused for submitting to his wants, rather than work like an ass to relieve them. Did you ever in your life know a man who was guided in the general course of his actions by any thing but his natural temper ? And yet we blame each other's conduct as freely as if that temper was the most tractable beast in the world, and we had nothing to do but to twitch the rein to the right or the left, and go just as we are directed by others ! All this is nonsense, and nothing better.

There are some sensible folks, who having great estates have wisdom enough too to spend them properly ; there are others who are not less wise, perhaps, as knowing how to shift without 'em. Between these two degrees are they who spend their money dirtily, or get it so. If you ask me where they are to be placed who amass much wealth in an

honest way, you must be so good as to find them first, and then I'll answer the question. Upon the whole, my dear Rowley, there is a degree of poverty that has no disgrace belonging to it; that degree of it, I mean, in which a man enjoys clean linen and good company; and if I never sink below this degree of it, I care not if I never rise above it. This is a strange epistle, nor can I imagine how the devil I came to write it; but here it is, such as it is, and much good may do you with it. I have no estate, as it happens, so if it should fall into bad hands, I shall be in no danger of a commission of lunacy. Adieu! Carr is well, and gives his love to you. Yours ever,

Sept. 2, 1762.

WM. COWPER.

When Cowper wrote this letter his little patrimony was in a course of regular diminution. It was not yet so reduced as to alarm him with the apprehension of coming to the last hundred, and arriving at that stage of poverty in which persons of a certain grade in society lose their caste, because they can no longer keep up the appearance which it requires. But the sands in an hour-glass appear to run faster when they begin to run low, and that he then contemplated the possible exhaustion of his means is evident. There is no proof that this was one of the causes which concurred in bringing on his disease of mind; but that disease assumed a decided character in the following year; in spite of his philosophy there must have existed uneasiness enough on the score of his affairs to prevent any wholesome and natural cheerfulness, and forced hilarity leaves behind it a more hollow and aching sense of exhaustion than is consequent upon the excitement of wine, or even of more deleterious stimulants.

His spirits, when he was in health, were far more buoyant than ordinary men are blest with. The circumstances which tended to support them, and deferred the evil day, were the probable expectation which he had of obtaining some appointment through the influence of his connections, the pleasure which he found in intellectual society, and the occasional occupation in which, owing to his intimacy with men of letters, he was engaged. But his literary friends

were more likely to assist him in keeping up his classical acquirements, than to enlarge his knowledge, or strengthen his understanding. His own temper was so easy, and his mind, while under any control of reason, so playful, that he could not fail to be a favorite with his associates; and his amiable disposition made him always see their good qualities in the best light, and overlook their faults. But he was in dangerous company at this time; and his moral sense, acute as it was, and his religious belief,—which, however little it may then have influenced his heart, was firmly grounded in his understanding,—might not always have preserved him from the effects of evil communications. He was removed from them just at the time when they were becoming most dangerous.

CHAPTER III.

COWPER'S LITERARY ASSOCIATES AND FRIENDS. BONNELL
THORNTON. COLMAN. LLOYD.

THORNTON and Colman were the most distinguished of Cowper's associates when he began to reside in the Temple. The former was four years his senior, the latter two years his junior. With Thornton, therefore, who was elected from Westminster to Christ Church, when Cowper was twelve years old, he could have formed no intimacy at school; with Colman it was otherwise. Colman and Thornton had become bosom friends at Oxford, and all three were members of the Nonsense Club.

Bonnell Thornton was the son of an apothecary in Maiden Lane, London, and was intended by his father for the medical profession. His first attempts as an author appeared in "The Student, or Oxford and Cambridge Monthly Miscellany," printed at Oxford for Mr. Newberry of St. Paul's Churchyard; a name and address once as widely circulated with the histories of Goody Two Shoes

and Giles Gingerbread, and other sixpenny books in gilt covers, as it has since been with Dr. James's powders and analeptic pills. Kit Smart was the principal conductor, and Warton and Johnson were occasional contributors. Thornton afterwards commenced a periodical work, entitled "Have at ye all, or the Drury Lane Journal," in rivalry, it is said, of Fielding's "Covent Garden Journal." Fielding's has been preserved, having been incorporated in his works; Thornton's remains have never been collected, and it is not known how long this Journal lasted: Mr. Alexander Chalmers had seen only twelve numbers. At the age of thirty he took the degree of Bachelor of Physic, and in the same year he and Colman began the "Connoisseur."

George Colman was born at Florence in 1733, when his father was British resident at the Grand Duke of Tuscany's court; a sister of his mother was married to the once well known Pulteney, Earl of Bath. Like Thornton, he was on the foundation at Westminster, though not elected into the College there till a year or two after Thornton had left it. That he was made an accomplished Latin scholar there, is certain, and not less so that he must have acquired a competent knowledge of Greek; but by his own account he worked in vain at Hebrew, and would have made little progress in any thing if the old Busbeian process had not been systematically applied. He was elected to Christ Church in 1751, and there, while yet an under graduate, commenced with Thornton, in January, 1754, the publication of the "Connoisseur."

It was then the age of periodical essays. The "Rambler," which revived the taste for them, had been immediately followed by the "Adventurer;" that paper had not yet closed its course, and during its publication the "World" had been started with all the advantages that could be given it by the aid of noble and fashionable contributors. By such aid it had reached a sale little short of two thousand five hundred; thus exceeding what the "Spectator" had obtained. Some reliance the two friends must have placed upon the demand for this kind of light literature, — light it had now become almost to the total exclusion of grave, or

even serious matter;¹ but their main confidence was in each other and in themselves. Thornton had been one of the contributors to the "Adventurer,"² and Colman, at the age of twenty, had there made what was probably his first appearance in public as a prose-writer. Their humor and their talents were well adapted to what they had undertaken; and Beaumont and Fletcher present what is probably the only parallel instance of literary coöperation so complete, that the portions written by the respective parties are undistinguishable. Upon taking leave of the public, in the concluding number, they say, "We have not only joined in the work, taken together, but almost every single paper is the joint product of both; and as we have labored equally in erecting the fabric, we cannot pretend that any one particular part is the sole workmanship of either. A hint has perhaps been started by one of us, improved by the other, and still further heightened by a happy coalition of sentiment in both; as fire is struck out by a mutual collision of flint and steel. Sometimes, like Strada's lovers conversing with the sympathetic needles, we have written papers together at fifty miles' distance from each other; the first rough draught or loose minutes of an essay have often travelled in the stage-coach from town to country, and from country to town; and we have frequently waited for the postman, whom we expected to bring us the remainder of a Connoisseur, with the same anxiety as we should wait for the half of a bank note, without which the other half would be of no value. These our joint labors, it may easily be imagined, would have soon broke off abruptly, if either had been too fondly attached to his own little conceits; or if we had conversed together with the jealousy of a rival, or the complaisance of a formal acquaintance, who smiles at every word that is said by his companion. Nor could this work have been carried on with so much cheer-

¹ Johnson said that the 'Connoisseur' "wanted matter; and his opinion of the 'World' was not much higher." — *Boswell*, ii. 198.

² The papers which Sir John Hawkins ascribed to Dr. Bathurst have been claimed for him. Mr. Chalmers had not the least doubt that they were his; and this opinion is strongly supported by internal evidence, which is in this instance more than ordinarily conclusive.

fulness and good humor on both sides, if the Two had not been as closely united as the two students, whom the 'Spectator' mentions, as recorded by a *Terræ Filius* at Oxford, to have had but one mind, one purse, one chamber, and one hat.³—For our own parts we cannot but be pleased with having raised this monument of our mutual friendship; and if these essays shall continue to be read, when they will no longer make their appearance as the fugitive pieces of the week, we shall be happy in considering that we are mentioned at the same time. We have all the while gone on, as it were, hand in hand together; and while we are both employed in furnishing matter for the paper now before us, we cannot help smiling at our thus making our exit together, like the Two Kings of Brentford, smelling at one nosegay."

Cowper contributed a few papers to the "Connoisseur." One of them is upon the subject of keeping secrets; and, though written in a strain of levity, it had so good an effect upon himself, that he says, "from that day he believed he had never divulged one."⁴ If he had not the same virtue of discretion before, (and so it may be inferred from such an acknowledgment,) this is a remarkable instance of the benefit that may be derived from calmly considering what our own opinions are upon any question of practical importance, before it happens directly to concern us.

He was also an occasional contributor to the "St. James's Chronicle." Thornton and Colman were two of the original proprietors of that newspaper, which at once assumed a literary character far above that of its rivals. They

³ The jest occurs in a speech published by Curll, of lasting infamy, in a collection impudently entitled, *Opera Posthuma Latina Viri doctissimi et clarissimi, Roberti South*. The two friends were the Dean of Christ Church, Dr. Fell, and Dr. Allestree, the Divinity Professor: *Tanta est amicitia inter illum et Theologiæ Professorem, ut unum habeant animum, unum lectum, et quod maximum est amicitiae signum, unum solummodo inter se habent galerum.*

An English note says, that this "*Terræ Filius*'s speech was made by Dr. South to be spoken by Henry Hill, of Corpus Christi College, afterwards D. D. and rector of Letcombe Bassett, in Berkshire, 1673; but afterwards it was spoken in July, 1674, by W. Gerard, M. A. of Wadham; for which he was expelled."

⁴ To Mr. Unwin, April 6, 1780.

had both been accustomed to write in newspapers and magazines, which in those days exercised more influence than the reviews, and to which indeed men of higher character and greater ability than were engaged in the critical journals, frequently sent communications. Both had thus acquired habits of desultory industry; and this had led them to indulge a disposition for playful satire, and to regard things in a ludicrous point of view, — satisfied if they could amuse themselves and others, without any worthier aim. No writer can pursue this course without injury to his own moral and intellectual nature. There was, however, nothing like malevolence in their satire; and they rendered themselves more obnoxious to the authors whom they eclipsed, than to those against whom their ridicule was directed; — for they levelled it sometimes against men whose merit they could not but acknowledge in their heart, as indeed they bore testimony to it in their better mind.

This humor was fostered at the Nonsense Club. At those meetings of

Jest and youthful Jollity,
Sport that wrinkled Care derides,
And Laughter holding both his sides,

there can be little doubt that the two odes to Obscurity and Oblivion originated, joint compositions of Lloyd and Colman, in ridicule of Gray and Mason. They were published in a quarto pamphlet, with a vignette, in the title-page, of an ancient poet safely seated and playing on his harp; and at the end a tail-piece representing a modern poet in huge boots, flung from a mountain by his Pegasus, into the sea, and losing his tie-wig in the fall.

Little did the two wits think how small in comparison with Gray they would appear in the eyes of posterity; and that the "Bard," which was then neglected by the public, would, in the course of the next generation, become the most popular ode in the English language. The poet took this unprovoked attack in his quiet and playful way. "I have sent you," said he, in a letter to Mason, "a bloody satire, written against no less persons than you and I by name. I concluded at first it was Mr. * * *, because

he is your friend, and my humble servant ; but then I thought he knew the world too well to call us the favorite minions of Taste and of Fashion, especially as to odes, for to them his ridicule is confined. So it is not he, but Mr. Colman, nephew to Lady Bath, author of the 'Connoisseur,' a member of one of the inns of court, and a particular acquaintance of Mr. Garrick. What have you done to him? for I never heard his name before. He makes very tolerable fun with me, when I understand him, which is not very often ; but seems more angry with you. Lest people should not understand the humor of the thing, (which indeed to do they must have our lyricisms at their fingers' ends,) letters come out in Lloyd's Evening Post to tell them who and what it was that they meant, and that it is like to produce a combustion in the literary world. So if you have any mind to *combustle* about it, well and good ; for me, I am neither so literary, nor so combustible." Touching upon the subject in a letter to Dr. Wharton, about the same time, he says, "I believe his Odes sell no more than mine did ; for I saw a heap of them lie in a bookseller's window, who recommended them to me as a very pretty thing."

Mason published the letter in which this passage occurs for the sake of showing how Gray felt on such occasions. "Had Mr. Pope," said he, "disregarded the sarcasms of the many writers that endeavored to eclipse his poetical fame, as much as Mr. Gray here appears to have done, the world would not have been possessed of a Dunciad ; but it would have been impressed with a more amiable idea of its author's temper." It was easy for Gray, in the consciousness of his own superiority, to smile at the cleverness with which his manner had been imitated in a mock-lyric strain ; no disparagement is implied in such burlesque ; and one of his temper could more easily forgive the personal ridicule, as unjust as it was unbecoming, than the authors would forgive themselves for it when they came to years of discretion. The personal attack upon Mason was equally reprehensible, and unfounded ; but his stilted style and obtrusive alliteration were not unfairly satirized ; and this perhaps he felt, for his later poems were not charac-

terized by the same faults. But if it was an act of prudence on his part to follow his friend's example, and express no resentment at an unprovoked attack, it was an act of forbearance also in him, who had both the temper and the talents for satire. Lloyd and Colman would hardly have assailed him if they had known that he was the most efficient satirist of the age ; for Mason it was who by an anonymous satire exploded that barbarous fashion of Chinese taste, which most of the contemporary essayists had attacked without effect.

What was personal and injurious in these mock lyrics is now so harmless, and what was always unexceptionable in them is so good, (for they are among the very best of their kind,) that whenever the works of Gray and Mason are, as they ought to be, conjointly published, it is to be hoped these pieces will find a place in the appendix, as a trophy to their fame.

Some singular displays of practical humor proceeded from the same Club. Thornton opened an exhibition of sign-paintings in Bow Street, Covent Garden. The hint for this inoffensive drollery was taken from the annual exhibition of pictures made by the Society for the promoting of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce, previous to the institution of the Royal Academy ; and materials for it were easily collected at a time when, upon every improvement in the city, the sign-posts were removed as nuisances. Thornton, who had always an eye for the humors and follies of the day, had been amused by the absurd combinations which appeared in many of these street-pictures, and had made them the subject of a paper in the *Adventurer*⁵ two years before. Following now the vein upon which he had then struck, he advertised for the same day on which the Society were to open their exhibition, an "Exhibition by the Society of Sign-Painters of all the curious signs to be met with in town or country, together with such original designs as might be transmitted to them as specimens of the native genius of the nation."

Unpromising as an exhibition of daubings might now

⁵ No. 9.

seem, "most of which had actually been hung in irons, and were nearly worn out in the service," it had no inconsiderable success, though the humor must have appeared to more advantage in the catalogue than in the collection itself. Some friendly hand announced it as the project of a well-known gentleman, who had in several instances displayed a most uncommon vein of humor, and who was perhaps the only person in England, (Mr. Hogarth excepted,) who could have projected or carried tolerably into execution such a scheme. "There is a whimsical drollery in all his pieces," it was said, "and a comical originality in his manner, that never fail to distinguish and recommend all his undertakings. To exercise his wit and humor in an innocent laugh, and to raise that innocent laugh in others, seems to have been his chief aim in the present spectacle. The ridicule on exhibitions, if it must be accounted so, is pleasant without malevolence; and the general strokes on the common topics of satire are given with the most apparent good humor."⁶

Hogarth, in fact, had entered into the humor of the adventure, and gave a few touches in chalk where effect could be added by it: thus in the portraits of the King of Prussia and the Empress Maria Teresa, he changed the cast of their eyes so as to make them leer significantly at each other. Every pot-house politician could understand this. But the wit was altogether of the most popular kind. A pair of thick legs, in white stockings and black garters, were described in the catalogue as No. 9—The Irishman's Arms, by Patrick O'Blaney. N. B. Captain Terence O'Cutter stood for them.—No. 12. The Scotch Fiddle. By M'Pherson; *done from himself*.—No. 16. A Man:—nine tailors at work.—No. 27. The Spirit of Contradiction:—two brewers bearing a cask, the men going different ways.—No. 35. A Man in his Element:—a cook roasted on a spit at a kitchen-fire, and the devil basting him.—No. 36. A Man out of his Element:—a sailor thrown from his horse, and his head striking against the ten-mile stone from Portsmouth.—No. 64. View of the Road to

⁶ Chalmers's Preface to the "Connoisseur."

Paddington, with a Representation of the Deadly Never-Green, that bears fruit all the year round ; the fruit at full length : — three felons on the gallows at Tyburn. — 73. A Man loaded with Mischief : — a fellow with a woman, a magpie, and a monkey on his back. — “It was one of those schemes,” Mr. Chalmers says, “which could not be expected to last, or to be repeated, and which the public, at a less good-humored period, might in all probability be disposed to consider as an insult.” The public, however, took it in good humor, as it was meant.⁷

When a pamphlet was published in France to ridicule the writings of Rousseau, a French critic well observed, “*il est fort aisé de le faire, rien ne prêtant plus à la parodie que le sublime, soit en style, soit en action, soit en morale.*”⁸ Burlesque and parody are indeed easy ; and the more famous the original, — the more sublime, it may be added, and even the more sacred, — the easier is the unworthy, or base, or blasphemous attempt to place it in a ridiculous point of view. But burlesque is not so easy when it appeals only to the sense of humor, without any admixture of malice or wicked ingredients. In this respect no writer had ever less reason than Bonnell Thornton to regret the indulgence of a dangerous taste for the ludicrous. Having made free with one of the arts in his Sign-post Exhibition, he took a liberty of the same inoffensive kind with the other two, in an Ode for St. Cecilia’s Day, adapted to the ancient British music of the salt-box, jew’s-harp, marrow-bones and cleavers, and humdrum, or hurdy-gurdy. This mock-lyric was so good in its kind, that Johnson used to praise it, and repeat some of the lines in the annexed specimen, which will show the humor of this metrical performance.

⁷ Churchill, in the “Ghost,” represents Fame as talking, among other topics,

Of sign-post exhibitions, rais’d
For laughter more than to be rais’d,
(Though, by the way, we cannot see
Why praise and laughter mayn’t agree ;)
Where genuine humor runs to waste,
And justly chides our want of taste,
Censured like other things, though good,
Because they are not understood.

Book iii. 273-80.

⁸ Bachaumont. *Memoires Secrets*, &c. tom. i. 305.

;

RECITATIVE, *accompanied.*

The meaner melody we scorn
Which vulgar instruments afford,
Shrill flute, sharp fiddle, bellowing horn,
Rumbling bassoon, or tinkling harpsichord.

AIR, *to the Salt-Box.*

In strains more exalted the Salt-box shall join,
And clattering and battering and clapping combine ;
With a rap and a tap while the hollow side sounds,
Up and down leaps the flap, and with rattling rebounds.

RECITATIVE, *to the Jews-Harp.*

Strike, strike the soft Judaic harp ;
Soft and sharp,
By teeth coercive in firm durance kept,
And lightly by the volant finger swept.

AIR.

Buzzing twangs the iron lyre,
Shrilly thrilling,
Trembling, trilling,
Whizzing with the wavering wire.

AIR, *after a grand Symphony accompanied with Marrow-bones and Cleavers.*

Hark, how the banging marrow-bones
Make clanging cleavers ring,
With a ding dong, ding dong,
Ding dong, ding dong,
Ding dong, ding dong, ding dong ding.
Raise your uplifted arms on high !
In long prolonged tones,
Let Cleavers sound
A merry merry round,
By banging Marrow-bones.

RECITATIVE, *to the Humstrum, or Hurdy-gurdy.*

Cease lighter numbers ; hither bring
The undulating string
Stretched out, and to the tumid bladder,
In amity harmonious bound ;
Then deeper swell the notes and sadder,
And let the hoarse base slowly solemn sound.

AIR.

With dead, dull, doleful, heavy hums,
With mournful moans
And grievous groans
The sober hurdy-gurdy thrums.

Thornton went through with the jest, as he did in the exhibition. The ode was set by Dr. Burney, and actually performed at Ranelagh to a crowded audience. But then the execution in some degree clashed with the design, for the singing was good; the performers were excellent musicians; the cleavers had been cast in bell-metal for the occasion, and sweet tones were produced from the jew's-harp by a person who had acquired the art of playing it with perfect skill.

Whether or not these frolics of wanton but inoffensive humor originated in the Nonsense Club cannot now be ascertained; but there can be no doubt that they were discussed and matured in that "noble institution," which fell to pieces about the time that Cowper was withdrawn from it. He had his full share in its merriment, and would never have alluded to it, as he has done with evident pleasure in the recollection, if he had seen any reason in his sadder mind to regret his connection with it. The whole tenor of his correspondence shows that his disposition was remarkably playful, and that his playfulness never transgressed the bounds of strict propriety. If he seldom spoke of those members who were cut off early in life, it was because it was painful on that account alone to think of them. Of the survivors Colman was often in his mind, and always remembered with kindness, except when he thought himself treated by him with a neglect which, because of that very kindness, he felt keenly; and Hill continued to be his intimate and faithful friend through life.

The friends who amused themselves in this club with banter and burlesque had, however, bonds of worthier sympathy. Cowper was born for better things; and Thornton and Colman, though they took the lead in every thing ludicrous, gave another proof of coincidence in their literary taste and occupations, not less remarkable than their joint authorship of the *Connoisseur*.

Colman translated Terence with admirable skill; and Thornton, when the intention was imparted to him, conceived the design of translating Plautus, in like manner, into what he called the old English measure, by which he meant the dramatic blank verse of Shakspeare and his im-

mediate followers. He published a specimen in his friend Lloyd's Magazine⁹, and that specimen was followed by some able essays, "concerning the advantages of measure in modern comedies, or in translations from those of the ancients." Colman assisted him by translating one play; and it is probable that he would have lent him further aid, if he had not at that time been much engaged in theatrical business and in composing pieces for the stage. When Thornton published two volumes of his intended version, he dedicated them to Colman, and the dedication is a pleasing memorial of that friendship which seems never to have been interrupted.

"I can never forget the time," he says, "when our literary amusements were so intimately blended, that we seemed to have one invention, one sentiment, one expression. The regularity of a periodical publication led us to a constant intercourse and communication of ideas; and whatever may be the fate of this present undertaking, I shall never repent my having dipt in ink, since it gave me an opportunity of cultivating a social as well as literary connection with you.

"Instead of prefixing your name to this work, with the distant air of a dedication, I wished to have had it coupled along with mine in the title-page; I wanted you as a *comes jucundus*, an *agreeable companion*, in this new, unbeaten track of translation, which you have so happily struck out before me. — I own, indeed, I shall feel a more than ordinary disappointment if I should be judged unworthy to rank with you in this humbler branch of literature; for I confess, in the pride of my heart, that one great inducement to my engaging in this task was the hope that our names would be mentioned together as the translators of Terence and Plautus; though I cannot aspire to an equal share of reputation with the author of 'The Jealous Wife,' or the joint author of 'The Clandestine Marriage.'"

Thornton only lived to publish seven of the plays, one of which was translated by Colman, and another by Mr. Warner, who continued the undertaking, and completed it in five volumes. His part is respectably executed; but

⁹ St. James's Magazine, December, 1762; vol. i. p. 265.

Thornton's is, as far as it goes, one of the best versions in our language from any ancient author. The skill with which he has compensated, by correspondent playfulness of wit, for what it was impossible to translate, is perhaps unrivalled.

Both Thornton and Colman were men of the world, in whose society Cowper's moral and religious feelings were not likely to be strengthened; but his principles were in no danger of being corrupted or shaken by them. However little the religion in which they had been trained up may have influenced the general tenor of their lives, it retained its hold on their belief. Their writings never conveyed any thing offensive to public morals or public faith; and there is every reason to suppose that they were perfectly sincere in the contempt which they expressed for the infidelity which was at that time in vogue, and in their abhorrence of the consequences to which they clearly saw its prevalence must inevitably lead. Poor Lloyd, who was also a member of the Nonsense Club, was a much more dangerous companion.

Robert Lloyd, whose father, Dr. Pierson Lloyd, was under-master at Westminster, was of the same age and standing as Colman, and was elected to Trinity College, Cambridge, when his compeer was elected to Oxford. The father¹⁰ was a humorist, and of course furnished, to those who were bred up under him, matter for innumerable stories, which there are now none to remember and to laugh at; unless, indeed, which is very likely, some of them have been transferred to his successors as they may have descended to him. But he was also a kind-hearted, equal-minded, generous, good man. Cowper loved his memory, and this feeling alone, he said, prompted him to attempt a translation of some Latin verses which were spoken¹¹ at the West-

¹⁰ He was connected nearly fifty years with the school, and had, very deservedly, a pension from the king of £400 a year. He died January 5, 1781, being at that time chancellor of York and portionist of Waddesdon in Buckinghamshire.

¹¹ I have before me the copy, in his own writing, which he sent to Mr. Unwin, with this heading, "Translation of the Latin Verses spoken in Honor of the late Dr. Lloyd, at the last Westminster Election, by W. C., who was two years under him while he was an usher, and had afterwards the happiness of his acquaintance."

minster election next after his decease. He had never learnt who wrote them ; but I can state that they were written by Dr. Vincent, who succeeded Lloyd as under-master ; who, like him, was for half a century connected with the school ; and who now, in like manner, lives in the grateful memory of his surviving pupils.

Happy had it been for Robert Lloyd, if, with the playful wit, the cheerful disposition, and the amiable temper of his father, he had inherited his wisdom and his virtue. He distinguished himself at Cambridge by his talents, but not in a way to procure for himself any academical honors or advantages. One of the earliest of Cowper's existing poems is an Epistle addressed to him while he was an under-graduate, and written in his own manner, — for that, at the age of one-and-twenty, had already been formed. The verses are remarkable on another account, for the following extract contains the first intimation of the writer's morbid feelings, and his own apprehension, even then, of their consequences.

'Tis not that I design to rob
Thee of thy birthright, gentle Bob,
For thou art born sole heir and single,
Of dear Mat Prior's easy jingle ;
Nor that I mean, while thus I knit
My thread-bare sentiments together,
To show my genius or my wit,
When God and you know, I have neither ;
Or such as might be better shown
By letting poetry alone.
'Tis not with either of these views
That I presume t' address the Muse ;
But to divert a fierce banditti,
(Sworn foes to every thing that's witty !)
That, with a black, infernal train,
Make cruel inroads in my brain,
And daily threaten to drive thence
My little garrison of sense :
The fierce banditti which I mean
Are gloomy thoughts led on by spleen.

Having taken his degree, and leaving a character in the university which would have been forgotten as well as charitably forgiven, if his after life had given proof of reformation, Lloyd returned to Westminster as an usher. That such

a situation was compatible with contentment and happiness, he knew from his father's example; that it was not incompatible with genius, he saw in Vincent Bourne. But though circumstances must have seemed to point it out as his peculiar destination, he became impatient of its wearisome routine, and resigned it in disgust. Possibly his religious opinions were at that time unsettled, and on that account he may have abandoned all intention of entering into orders, and consequently renounced the hopes of preferment, which otherwise in such a situation he might have entertained. But there is no intimation of this in his Apology; he speaks in that poem with bitterness of the intellectual drudgery, and assigns no other cause for throwing himself upon the world as a literary adventurer.

Were I at once empowered to show
My utmost vengeance on my foe,
To punish with extremest rigor,
I could inflict no penance bigger
Than, using him as learning's tool,
To make him usher of a school.
For, not to dwell upon the toil
Of working on a barren soil,
And laboring with incessant pains
To cultivate a blockhead's brains,
The duties there but ill befit
The love of letters, arts, or wit.

* * * *

For me, it hurts me to the soul
To brook confinement or control;
Still to be pinioned down to teach
The syntax and the parts of speech;
Or, what perhaps is drudgery worse,
The links, and points, and rules of verse;
To deal out authors by retail,
Like penny pots of Oxford ale:
Oh! 'tis a service irksome more
Than tugging at the slavish oar!
Yet such his task — a dismal truth —
Who watches o'er the bent of youth,
And while, a paltry stipend earning,
He sows the richest seeds of learning,
And tills *their* minds with proper care,
And sees them their due produce bear,
No joys, alas! his toil beguile;
His *own* lies fallow all the while.

"Yet still he's on the road," you say,
 "Of learning." — Why, perhaps he may,
 But turns like horses in a mill,
 Nor getting on, nor standing still ;
 For little way his learning reaches,
 Who reads no more than what he teaches.

Poor Lloyd had some misgivings before he ventured upon the perilous profession of authorship. For when one of his friends advised him to try his fortune with the public, he replied in a manner which seemed to show a proper regard to prudential considerations, as well as a just estimate of his own talents.

You say I should get fame. I doubt it :
 Perhaps I am as well without it ;
 For what's the worth of empty praise ?
 What poet ever dined on bays ?
 And though the laurel — rarest wonder . —
 May screen us from the stroke of thunder,
 This mind I ever was and am in,
 It is no antidote to famine.

* * * *

Tempt me no more then to the crime
 Of dabbling in the font of rhyme :
 My muse has answered all her end
 If her productions please a friend.
 The world is burdened with a store ;
 Why need I add one scribbler more ?

But though Lloyd never appears to have overrated himself, and knew that he was never likely to undertake, still less to execute, any thing of great pith and moment, he was tempted by the desire of that reputation which so many mistake for fame, and which those authors who have no worthier object than immediate profit or present applause, prefer to it. His earliest pieces appeared in the "Connoisseur," and the friendly editor did not let pass the fair opportunity of praising them. This was before he left Cambridge, and, in one of his communications to that paper, he says, "You must know, sir, that in the language of our old dons, every young man is ruined who is not an arrant Tycho Brahe or Erra Pater. Yet it is remarkable, that though the servants of the muses meet with more than ordinary

discouragement at this place, Cambridge has produced many celebrated poets ; witness Spenser, Milton, Cowley, Dryden, &c. ; not to mention some admired writers of the present times. I myself, sir, am grievously suspected of being better acquainted with Homer and Virgil than Euclid or Saunderson ; and am universally agreed to be ruined, for having concerned myself with hexameter and pentameter more than diameter." But Latin verses were as much in his vocation at Westminster as mathematics might be at Cambridge ; and the love of classical pursuits, instead of marring his fortune there, would have materially contributed to make it.

The success which Thornton and Colman had obtained, undoubtedly raised his hopes and increased his confidence. At that time they seemed to have no further ambition than to become conspicuous among the wits of the age ; and being conscious that he was not inferior to them in any of the qualifications which such ambition required, he was impatient to be ranked in the same class. It is not uninteresting, and possibly may not be useless, to trace the state of his mind progressively in his own poems ; ephemeral as they were, they become valuable when they with perfect fidelity exhibit the feelings of a literary adventurer, who, with great talents, great industry, and many amiable qualities, fell an early victim to his own unhappy principles and conduct.

Within four years after he had declared his unwillingness to increase the number of scribblers in rhyme, he thus acknowledged the change which had taken place in his mind upon that subject : —

Whether a blessing or a curse,
My rattle is the love of verse.
Some fancied parts and emulation,
Which still aspires to reputation,
Made infant fancy plume her flight,
And held the laurel full to sight.
For vanity, the poet's sin,
Had ta'en possession all within ;
And he whose brain is verse-possessed,
Is in himself as highly blessed
As he whose lines and circles vie
With Heaven's direction of the sky.

CHAPTER IV.

CHURCHILL. COWPER'S EARLY POLITICS. HIS ADMIRATION
OF CHURCHILL.

CHARLES CHURCHILL, eldest son of the Reverend Charles Churchill, rector of Rainham, near Grays, in Essex, and many years curate and lecturer of St. John's, Westminster, was born in February, 1731, in his father's house, in Vine Street. At about eight years of age, he was sent to Westminster as a day-boy, his father assisting his education at home; and at the age of fifteen, he went into the college there, as head of his election. There is a foolish story, that when he should have been elected from that foundation to one of the universities, instead of making proper replies to the questions propounded to him, he launched out into satirical remarks upon the abilities of the person who examined him. Another story, which has just as little truth in it, is that he was rejected at Oxford, on account of his deficiency in Latin and Greek. No such deficiency could possibly be found, in any one who had gone in head of an election at Westminster; the truth seems to be, that he disqualified himself by a secret marriage for the studentship, to which he must otherwise have been elected; and probably on this occasion it was, that the secret was disclosed to his father.¹ It had been a Fleet marriage, and soon after it had been solemnized (if that term may be applied to such a ceremony performed under such circumstances) the father properly received the rash couple into his own house.

He was entered at Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1749, but it does not appear that he ever resided there; and after

¹ I am withheld, by want of accurate data, from stating as certainty what I believe to be so. His intimacy with the young lady, whose father lived in the immediate neighborhood of the school, commenced when he was little more than seventeen, that is, in 1748, and in the ensuing year he was entered at Trinity College, Cambridge. Dr. Anderson mentions a report (undoubtedly erroneous) that he was for a short time at St. John's, then under Dr. Rutherford.

remaining with his father about twelve months, during which time his conduct is said to have been perfectly regular and domestic, he removed to Sunderland, influenced, it is said, by family reasons; but it is not known what those reasons were, nor by what resources he was supported. There, it is added, almost the whole of his time was devoted to his favorite poetical amusements, till feeling the necessity of applying to professional studies, that he might be qualified for holy orders, he pursued them for about two years with indefatigable diligence; and then, at the age of twenty-two, returned to London, to take possession of a small property in right of his wife. At the canonical age, Bishop Willes (of Bath and Wells) ordained him deacon upon the curacy of Cadbury,² in Somersetshire; thither he immediately removed; and there he is said to have carefully discharged the duties of his calling, till, in 1756, Bishop Sherlock ordained him priest, and he migrated to his father's curacy at Rainham. On both occasions, the want of a degree was dispensed with, on the strength of his good character and his reputation for learning.

The cares of a family were now pressing on him; he opened a school, and obtained, in a short time, as much encouragement as could be expected in a place not advantageously situated for such an undertaking. This was the most disagreeable pursuit in which he had ever been en-

² Whether North or South, I do not find stated. The incumbent, Mr. Bailey, is spoken of as his friend.

Dr. Anderson says, "His first provision in the church was a curacy of thirty pounds a year in Wales, to which remote part of the kingdom he retired with his wife, and applied himself to the duties of his station with assiduity and cheerfulness. His behavior gained him the love and esteem of his parishioners; and his sermons, though somewhat raised above the level of his audience, were commended and followed. But, being prompted to engage in trade, to add to his income, he kept a cider warehouse, with a view of vending that commodity in the neighboring country. In a short time, he experienced the folly of this deviation from his clerical profession, and a kind of rural bankruptcy soon followed."

The last editor of Churchill's poems endeavored to ascertain the truth of this statement, which has often been repeated; but he could find no mention of any such circumstance in the family papers which were put into his hands, and had every reason, he says, to believe that Cadbury and Rainham were the only country churches in which Churchill ever officiated as curate.

gaged, and he used to say that nothing but the heartfelt consciousness that he was doing his duty, could have supported him through it. The trial was not long. In 1758, his good father died, and as a mark of respect for his memory, the parishioners of St. John's elected the son to succeed him in their curacy and lectureship. According to his last editor, this honorable testimony to his father's worth and to his own character, became with him an additional incentive for persevering in the upright course which he had hitherto pursued. He engaged again in the business of tuition, but in a way which exempted him from any responsibility or anxieties, giving "lessons in the English tongue to the young ladies at Mrs. Dennis's boarding-school, in Queen Square, Bloomsbury; and attending several young gentlemen, who, having acquired competent skill in the dead languages, were desirous of receiving some assistance in forming their taste and directing their studies with respect to the classical authors of antiquity." The same biographer says, that he performed his parochial duties at this time with the utmost punctuality, and that in the pulpit, he was plain, rational, and emphatic.

He, however, describes himself as an inert pastor and soporific preacher at that time; "whilst," in his own words, (and they are some of the last verses that he composed,)

— I kept those sheep,
Which for my curse I was ordained to keep,
Ordained, alas! to keep through need, not choice, —
Those sheep which never heard their shepherd's voice,
Which did not know, yet would not learn their way,
Which strayed themselves, yet grieved that I should stray;
Those sheep which my good father (on his bier
Let filial duty drop the pious tear)
Kept well, yet starved himself; even at that time,
Whilst I was pure and innocent of rhyme,
Whilst, sacred dulness ever in my view,
Sleep at my bidding crept from pew to pew.³

The fact was, that if Churchill had at any time given his mind to his profession, (of which his sermons contain no proof,) his heart was never in it. He had now begun to

³ Dedication to his Sermons.

feel cravings of an ambition for which in that profession there was no scope; he disliked what was to him its drudgery, and perhaps was becoming impatient of its restraints. He had also causes for serious unhappiness in the temper and conduct of his wife, who had equal or more reason for complaint on a similar score; and their joint imprudence occasioned a growing weight of embarrassments, which brought him to the brink of ruin, so that he lived in constant fear of an arrest, and was compelled to secrete himself from his creditors. How deeply he felt the misery of such a condition he has himself thus forcibly expressed:—

And at this hour those wounds afresh I feel,
Which nor prosperity nor time can heal;
Those wounds, which fate severely hath decreed,
Mentioned, or thought of, must forever bleed;
Those wounds, which humbled all that pride of man
Which brings such mighty aid to virtue's plan.
Once, awed by fortune's most oppressive frown,
By legal rapine to the earth bowed down,
My credit at last gasp, my state undone,
Trembling to meet the shock I could not shun,
Virtue gave way, and black despair prevailed.
Sinking beneath the storm, my spirits failed,
Like Peter's faith; but one, a friend indeed,
(May all distress find such in time of need!)
One kind, good man, in act, in word, in thought,
By virtue guided, and by wisdom taught,
Image of Him whom Christians should adore,
Stretched forth his hand, and brought me safe to shore.

That "kind, good man" was Dr. Lloyd, who interposed with the creditors, persuaded them to accept of five shillings in the pound, and advanced part of the sum required for extricating him upon this composition. It is certain that he would not have thus come forward as Churchill's friend, unless he had seen in him much more to admire and love, as well as to pity and excuse, than there then was to condemn. One consequence of Churchill's appointment to the curacy of St. John's, had been the renewal of his acquaintance with Lloyd the son; more than an acquaintance it could not have been at school, because there was a difference of two years' standing between them; it now ripened into friendship, and this also may be concluded that the

father, at this time, saw no evil to be apprehended from their intimacy. He knew what the character of the boy had been, and no one could foresee the change which was about to take place in the man.

But two men who were both conscious of talents, ambitious of distinction, and discontented with their situations in life, were dangerous companions for each other. Had either of them been blessed with moral strength and with religious principles, by which alone such strength can be rendered secure, both might, probably, at this crisis have been saved. But Lloyd had led a licentious life; and Churchill was beginning, in place of that faith whereby our happiness here and hereafter is assured, to entertain a system of earthly and sensual philosophy, which, if it has since been more insolently avowed in this country, has not yet been displayed with such flagitious profligacy as in those days. At what time he became a speculative infidel is not known; but it appears that there had been no open immorality in his conduct before his embarrassments, nor any cause for suspecting it. Pecuniary distress seems, by his own testimony, to have made him first plunge into excesses; and the arrangement which relieved had not the effect of reclaiming him. Once having relaxed the bonds of self-restraint, he broke loose. His home then became a scene of continual discord whenever he returned to it; just but irritating reproaches provoked him to recrimination, for which, it is said, there was too much cause; and these disgraceful disputes ended, in February, 1761, in a total separation.

At this time he had begun to try his fortune as a poet. The first production which he offered to the booksellers was entitled "The Bard," in Hudibrastic verse; it was rejected without hesitation; and as he, who was little scrupulous what he published, could never be induced to bring this forward when his name would have given it vogue, it is evident that his own opinion of its worthlessness agreed with that which had disappointed his first hopes. A satire upon the Dean and Chapter of Westminster, called "The Conclave," was his next attempt, Dr. Zachary Pearce, afterwards Bishop of Rochester, being then the Dean.

The characters are said to have been "nervously drawn, boldly colored, and nicely discriminated:" that it was poignant and sarcastic may be easily believed; but it was so personal, and probably indeed so libellous, that the lawyer whose opinion was taken upon it, pronounced that it could not be printed without danger of a prosecution. This second disappointment made him seek for a safer subject, and one of more general interest. Lloyd's recent success with "The Actor" suggested the thought of "The Rosciad;" and after two months' close attendance at the theatres, Churchill completed that poem. He offered it to several booksellers, but none could be found to give him five guineas, which he had fixed upon as its price. On this occasion, however, he confided in his own opinion of its merit, and in that of the friends to whom it had been shown; and relying also upon the attractiveness of the subject, he ventured to publish it on his own account, which, in his circumstances, was no trifling hazard. It was published in March, 1761, without the author's name.

The Rosciad is said to have occasioned a greater sensation in the public mind than had ever before been excited by any poetical performance. If this were to be literally understood, a severer reproach could not be cast upon the taste and feeling of the British nation. When the *Progress of Poetry* and the *Bard* were published, four years before, the reviewers regretted that Gray should choose thus to seek for fame among the learned, and exert his talents in efforts which, "at best, could amuse only the few, instead of studying the people;" and they presumed he would not be greatly disappointed if he found the public backward in commending a performance not entirely suited to their apprehensions.⁴ Collins's "Odes" were at that very time covered with dust and cobwebs in the warehouse of the unlucky publisher. And we are told, that when Churchill affixed his name to the second edition of "The Rosciad," "he sprang, at one bound, from the most perfect obscurity to the first rank in literary fame!" — Fame were indeed a bubble if it could spring up so suddenly, and burst so soon!

⁴ Monthly Review, Sept. 1757.

The poem, on its first appearance, was ascribed, in "the Critical Review," to Lloyd, with a degree of confidence in the critic's own discernment, and of personal insolence which has not often been surpassed by any modern professor of the ungentle craft. It was not in any spirit of emulation, still less of rivalry, that Churchill had entered upon the same field as his friend, nor is it to be believed that Lloyd partook, even for a moment, of any feeling akin to envy. The poem had no sooner been ascribed to him than he disclaimed it, by an advertisement in the newspaper; and when it was owned by Churchill, he generously and publicly acknowledged his own inferiority.

For me, who labor with poetic sin,
Who often woo the Muse I cannot win,
Whom Pleasure first a willing poet made,
And Folly spoiled, by taking up the trade,
Pleased I behold superior genius shine,
Nor, tinged with envy, wish that genius mine;
To Churchill's muse can bow with decent awe,
Admire his mode, nor make that mode my law;
Both may perhaps have various powers to please;
Be his the strength of numbers, mine the ease.

It has been injuriously said that Lloyd regarded with some disgust the extraordinary success of the *Rosciad*, which so greatly exceeded that of his own poem. They who said this were incapable of appreciating, and perhaps of understanding, the nobler parts of his character. There was neither disgust nor mortification in the natural wish that his own ticket had been drawn as good a prize, living as he now did by the precarious profits of his pen—a wish, not that Churchill had been less fortunate, but that he himself had been equally so. And when the reviewer insulted him with the gross imputation of having been his own eulogist, that provocation was not needed to make him regard his friend's cause as his own.

But Churchill was not one of those authors who may be attacked with impunity. He knew where his strength lay, and that the public also knew it; and he speedily followed the *Rosciad* with his "Apology, addressed to the Critical Reviewers." This was as successful as its predecessor;

and from the profits of the two he paid up his creditors to the full amount of those debts for which he had compounded, properly considering that the legal discharge could only be considered as conditionally a moral one. This was consistent with the generosity and straight-forward manliness of his character. But neither he nor Lloyd was happy; they had commenced authors by profession about the same time; and as the one had renounced his scholastic employment, the other threw off the restraints of his order, and as if to show his contempt for it, appeared in a gold-laced waistcoat, a gold-laced hat, and ruffles. Both had rapidly attained the celebrity they desired; the one had no apprehension that poverty would ever overtake him in his course, and the other had opened for himself a source of immediate prosperity. Having exempted themselves from the ordinary business and ordinary duties of life, they lived as if present gratification were their sole object. Those who had been wounded by Churchill's satires, revenged themselves now by attacking him in his moral character, where alone he was vulnerable; Lloyd, whose name now was commonly associated with his, was reproached as the companion of his midnight excesses; and not enemies alone, but false friends also, who affected, if Wilkes may be believed, to pay the highest compliments to their genius, were most industrious in seizing every opportunity of condemning their conduct in private life. "These *prudent* persons," says the arch-demagogue of his day, "found a malicious pleasure in propagating the story of every unguarded hour, and in gratifying that rage after the little anecdotes of admired authors upon which small wits subsist. The curiosity of the town was fed by these people from time to time; and every dull lecturer within the bills of mortality, comforted himself that he did not keep such hours as Mr. Churchill and Mr. Lloyd!" Wilkes defends "the two English poets," as he denominates them, for passing their nights after the manner of the first men of antiquity, "who knew," he says, "how to redeem the fleeting hours from Death's half-brother, and fellow-tyrant, 'Sleep.' They lamented the shortness and uncertainty of human life; but both only served to give a keener relish to

their pleasures, and as the truest argument not to let any portion of it pass unenjoyed.”⁵ Wilkes ought to have known that it was among the philosophers of the porch, and not of the sty, that the first men of antiquity were found!

But when Churchill thought it necessary, in his poem called *Night*, to defend himself and his friend against these attacks, though the defence in its general tone was a defiance to the world, it contained a mournful avowal, that they met for the sake of drowning reflection, each seeking in the other's society a refuge from himself. The motto to this piece, “*Contrarius evehor orbi*,” marks the spirit in which it was conceived; but a sadder and saner feeling was confessed in the opening lines.

When foes insult, and prudent friends dispense,
In pity's strains, the worst of insolence,
Oft with thee, Lloyd, I steal an hour from grief,
And in thy social converse find relief.
The mind, of solitude impatient grown,
Loves any sorrows rather than her own.

Let slaves to business, bodies without soul,
Important blanks in Nature's mighty roll,
Solemnize nonsense in the day's broad glare;
We *night* prefer, which heals or hides our care.

At this time it was that they became intimate with Wilkes, Churchill more especially, whose bolder temper led him to take an active part in the political adventures of his new friend. Wilkes called Churchill the noblest of poets, and Churchill thought Wilkes the purest of patriots; and in this opinion each was probably as sincere as he was mistaken. Wilkes had no predilection for any thing better than his friend's poetry, though he had a depraved taste for what was worse; and Churchill had honestly taken up the political opinions which his profligate associate used as means for repairing a broken fortune. This new connection determined the character of Churchill's future life. He became Wilkes's coadjutor in the *North Briton*; and

⁵ Almon's Correspondence, &c. of Wilkes, vol. iii. p. 10.

the publishers, when examined before the privy council on the publication of No. 45, having declared that Wilkes gave orders for the printing, and Churchill received the profits from the sale, orders were given for arresting Churchill under the general warrant. He was saved from arrest by Wilkes's presence of mind, who was in custody of the messenger when Churchill entered the room. "Good morning, Mr. Thompson," said Wilkes to him. "How does Mrs. Thompson do? Does she dine in the country?" Churchill took the hint as readily as it had been given. He replied, that Mrs. Thompson was waiting for him, and that he only came, for a moment, to ask him how he did. Then almost directly he took his leave, hastened home, secured his papers, retired into the country, and eluded all search.⁶

Wilkes, during his outlawry, made secret inquiries whether, if he established himself in France, the French government would favor him in his measures for annoying his own. His project was, that Churchill should join him there, and assist him as he had done in the North Briton; and he was assured that he and his friend⁷ might come to France, and to Paris, as often as they pleased, and remain as long there, and that he might print there whatever he chose. "If I stay at Paris," said he, in one of his letters, "I will not be forgot in England, for I will feed the papers from time to

⁶ This is stated by Wilkes himself, in his second letter to the Duke of Grafton. Mr. Almon says nothing of these circumstances; but as if for the sake of contrasting his own conduct advantageously, says, that after he himself had left the house, Churchill called there, but his fear for his own personal safety would not permit him to stay a moment.—A more catch-penny work has seldom issued from the press upon the decease of a public character, than Mr. Almon's Memoirs and Correspondence of John Wilkes.

⁷ The answer came from the Duc de Praslin, by the king's orders, to M. St. Foy, *premier commis des affaires étrangères*, in these words:—*Les deux illustres Jean Wilkes et Charles Churchill peuvent venir en France et à Paris aussi souvent, et pour autant de tems, qu'ils le jugeront à propos, &c.* In the same letter to his friend, agent, and tool, Mr. Humphrey Cotes, Wilkes says, "If government means peace or friendship with me, and to save their honor, I then breathe no longer hostility. And between ourselves, if they would send me ambassador to Constantinople, it is all I should wish." He adds, "I think, however, the king can never be brought to this, though the ministry would wish it."—Almon's Correspondence, &c. vol. ii. 53, 54.

time with gall and vinegar against the administration. I cannot express to you how much I am courted here, nor how pleased our inveterate enemies are with 'The North Briton.'"

However much Wilkes may have been gratified by such an acknowledgment of his own importance, it is possible that Churchill's English feelings might have revolted at a scheme which those "inveterate enemies" thought it their interest to favor. He had now become altogether a political satirist; and it was the sincerity and severity of those feelings which gave life and vigor to his poems. They followed each other with extraordinary rapidity and extraordinary success. No English poet had ever enjoyed so excessive and so short-lived a popularity; and indeed no one seems more thoroughly to have understood his own powers; there is no indication in any of his pieces that he could have done any thing better than the thing he did. To Wilkes, he said, that nothing came out till he began to be pleased with it himself; but to the public he boasted of the haste and carelessness with which his verses were poured forth.

Had I the power, I could not have the time,
 Whilst spirits flow, and life is in her prime,
 Without a sin 'gainst pleasure, to design
 A plan, to methodize each thought, each line,
 Highly to finish, and make every grace,
 In itself charming, take new charms from place.
 Nothing of books, and little known of men,
 When the mad fit comes on, I seize the pen;
 Rough as they run, the rapid thoughts set down,
 Rough as they run, discharge them on the town.⁸

Popularity which is so easily gained is lost as easily; such reputations resembling the lives of insects, whose shortness of existence is compensated by its proportion of enjoyment. He perhaps imagined that his genius would preserve his subjects, as spices preserve a mummy; and that the individuals whom he had eulogized or stigmatized would go down to posterity in his verse, as an old admiral comes home from the West Indies in a puncheon of rum;

⁸ Gotham, b. ii.

he did not consider that the rum is rendered loathsome, and that the spices with which the Pharaohs and Potiphars were embalmed, wasted their sweetness in the catacombs. But in this part of his conduct there was no want of worldly prudence: he was enriching himself by hasty writings, for which the immediate sale was in proportion to the bitterness and personality of the satire;⁹ and unscrupulous as this was, he took care that it should not bring him within reach of the law. More sacred laws he set at defiance. The parishioners, who had invited him to succeed his father, were compelled, at length, to lodge a formal complaint against him for the total dereliction of his professional duties; and he resigned in consequence a cure which he could no longer have been suffered to retain.

About this time it was that he became intimate with the daughter of a tradesman in Westminster, seduced her, and prevailed on her to quit her father's house and live with him. That he had ceased to be a Christian is but too apparent, but his moral sense had not been thoroughly depraved;—a fortnight had not elapsed before both parties were struck with sincere compunction, and through the intercession of a true friend, at their entreaty, the unhappy penitent was received by her father. It is said she would have proved worthy of this parental forgiveness, if an elder sister had not, by continual taunts and reproaches, rendered her life so miserable, that in absolute despair she threw herself upon Churchill for protection. Instead of making a just provision for her, which his means would have allowed, he received her as his mistress. Under all circumstances, it would be judging too severely to call this an aggravation of the crime; but he attempted not to vindicate his conduct, either to himself or others. Wilkes, who was the most profligate of men, had not in this respect corrupted his bet-

⁹ It was in Churchill's time that Foote made Puff the publisher say, "Why, who the devil will give money to be told that Mr. Such-a-one is a wiser or better man than himself? No, no; 'tis quite and clean out of nature. A good sousing satire now, well powdered with personal pepper, and seasoned with the spirit of party, that demolishes a conspicuous character, and sinks him below our own level; then, then, we are pleased; then we chuckle and grin, and toss the half-crown on the counter."

ter nature ; and, if all his other writings were forgotten, the lines in which he expressed his compunction, would deserve always to be remembered. They are in a poem called the "Conference," in which an imaginary lord and himself are the interlocutors.

L. Hath Nature (strange and wild conceit of pride !)

Distinguished thee from all her sons beside ?
 Doth virtue in thy bosom brighter glow,
 Or from a spring more pure doth action flow ?
 Is not thy soul bound with those very chains
 Which shackle us ? or is that self which reigns
 O'er kings and beggars, which in all we see
 Most strong and sovereign, only weak in thee ?
 Fond man, believe it not ! Experience tells
 'Tis not thy virtue, but thy pride rebels.
 Think, — and for once lay by thy lawless pen, —
 Think, and confess thyself like other men ;
 Think but one hour, and to thy conscience led
 By Reason's hand, bow down and hang thy head :
 Think on thy private life ; recall thy youth,
 View thyself now, and own, with strictest truth,
 That self hath drawn thee from fair virtue's way,
 Farther than folly would have dared to stray,
 And that the talents liberal Nature gave
 To make thee free, have made thee more a slave.

C. Ah ! what, my Lord, hath private life to do
 With things of public nature ? Why to view
 Would you thus cruelly those scenes unfold,
 Which without pain and horror to behold,
 Must speak me something more or less than man,
 Which friends may pardon, but I never can !
 Look back ! a thought which borders on despair,
 Which human nature must, yet cannot bear.
 'Tis not the babbling of a busy world,
 Where praise and censure are at random hurled,
 Which can the meanest of my thoughts control,
 Or shake one settled purpose of my soul ;
 Free and at large might their wild curses roam,
 If all, if all, alas ! were well at home.
 No ; 'tis the tale which angry conscience tells,
 When she with more than tragic horror swells
 Each circumstance of guilt ; when stern, but true,
 She brings bad actions forth into review,
 And like the dread hand writing on the wall,
 Bids late remorse awake at reason's call ;

Armed at all points, bids scorpion vengeance pass,
 And to the mind holds up reflection's glass,—
 The mind, which starting heaves the heart-felt groan,
 And hates that form she knows to be her own.

Enough of this. Let private sorrows rest :
 As to the public, I dare stand the test ;
 Dare proudly boast, I feel no wish above
 The good of England, and my country's love.¹⁰

This passage bears the stamp of truth, both in its confession of remorse, and in its proud profession of political integrity. In the same poem, the author imprecates upon himself, as a curse, that if he should desert his party, he might feign a false zeal for the cause of God, and use His name for some base private end,

——— though to His service deeply tied
 By sacred oaths, and more by will allied.¹¹

Formerly, he had intimated unequivocally, that when he had thrown off the gown, he had thrown off with it his belief in revelation ;¹² but from these expressions, it may be hoped that a sense of guilt had now brought him to a better state of mind. Churchill was no hypocrite ; his temper led him at all times rather to defy public opinion than defer to it ; and he was too honest, either to assume a virtue that he had not, or to affect an impious hardihood when conscience troubled him.

Cowper had a higher opinion of Churchill than of any other contemporary writer. "It is a great thing," he said, "to be indeed a poet, and does not happen to more than one man in a century ; but Churchill, the great Churchill, deserved that name."¹³ — "It is an affair," said he, "of very little consequence, perhaps, to the well-being of man-

¹⁰ Conference, v. 183—202, 213—240.

¹¹ V. 253.

¹² ——— blessed are the souls which know
 Those pleasures which from true conversion flow,
Whether to Reason, who now rules my breast,
 Or to pure faith, like Lyttelton and West.

Prophecy of Famine, v. 229—232.

¹³ Letter to Mr. Unwin.

kind ; but I cannot help regretting that he died so soon. Those words of Virgil, upon the immature death of Marcellus, might serve for his epitaph :

*Ostendent terris hunc tantum fata, neque ultra
Esse sinent."*

Cowper made him, more than any other writer, his model. No two poets could be more unlike each other in habits, temper, and disposition. Their only sympathy was in a spirit of indignation, taking in both the form of satire, but which the one directed against individuals, for what he deemed their political turpitude, or for offence given to himself or his friends ; the other, against the prevailing sins and errors of the age. Churchill's object was to annoy those whom he disliked ; Cowper's, to exhort and reclaim his fellow-creatures. He, however, found something so congenial to his own taste and sentiments in the strength and manliness of Churchill's poetry, the generous love of liberty which it breathed, and its general tone of morals, that its venom and virulence seem to have given him no displeasure. No doubt he thought that the principal objects of Churchill's satire deserved the severity with which they were treated, for the flagitious profligacy of their private lives ; and his own feelings went with the satirist, because his political opinions were of the same school.

"I learned, when I was a boy," says he, "being the son of a staunch Whig, and a man that loved his country, to glow with that patriotic enthusiasm which is apt to break forth into poetry, or at least to prompt a person, if he has any inclination that way, to poetical endeavors. Prior's pieces of that sort were recommended to my particular notice ; and as that part of the present century was a season when clubs of a political character, and consequently political songs, were much in fashion, the best in that style, some written by Rowe, and, I think, some by Congreve, and many by other wits of the day, were proposed to my admiration. Being grown up, I became desirous of imitating such bright examples ; and while I lived in the Temple, produced several halfpenny ballads, two or three of

which had the honor to be popular."¹⁴ — It is to be wished these could be discovered; for the ballad is a species of composition which he tells us he was ever fond of, and to which, more than to any other, he should have addicted himself, if graver matters had not called him another way. He inherited a taste for it, he said, from his father, who succeeded well in it himself, and who lived at a time when the best pieces in that kind were produced.¹⁵

In another letter,¹⁶ he says to Mr. Hill, "I recollect that, in those happier days when you and I could spend our evening in enumerating victories and acquisitions that seemed to follow each other in a continued series, there was some pleasure in hearing a politician; and a man might talk away upon so entertaining a subject without danger of becoming tiresome to others, or incurring weariness himself. When poor Bob White brought in the news of Boscawen's success off the coast of Portugal, how did I leap for joy! When Hawke demolished Conflans, I was still more transported. But nothing could express my rapture when Wolfe made the conquest of Quebec."

No intimacy, however, appears to have subsisted between Cowper and Churchill, notwithstanding these points of sympathy, and their acquaintance at school, though they were of the same standing there. Churchill was not a member of the Nonsense Club; and when he threw himself upon the town, he connected himself with associates of a much worse description than his old schoolfellows. He clung to Lloyd indeed, and Lloyd to him. Thornton and Colman made common cause with them as men of letters; but though not remarkable for prudence themselves, they were discreet enough not to join in their orgies, and were by no means inclined to form any intimate connection with Wilkes after he had declared war against the government. Wilkes, moreover, thought ill of Thornton; his own vices were so open and notorious, that no room was left for any one to think worse of him than he had proclaimed himself

¹⁴ Letter to Mr. Newton, Dec. 4, 1761.

¹⁵ To Mr. Unwin, Aug. 4, 1783.

¹⁶ January 3, 1782.

to be: but ill opinion implies dislike, and dislikes are generally mutual. And Colman was as much attached to Thornton, as Churchill to Wilkes, and as Lloyd to Churchill.

The same reasons, probably, withheld Cowper from forming an intimacy with Churchill, sincerely as he admired his talents. His constitution could not have withstood the excesses which Churchill braved in the strength of a robust frame, and boasted of with the audacity of a mind little less vain than it was vigorous. Cowper's head could have borne wine as well;¹⁷ but his health required him to keep regular hours, and his disposition inclined him to a quiet life. His finer nature would have revolted from Churchill's coarseness; and if he could have endured the conversation of Wilkes in society where Wilkes was under no restraint, (which is not to be supposed,) it would have been ruinous for him, with the prospects which he then entertained, to have brought upon himself the imputation of being a Wilkite.

It was by the acrimony and personality of his satire, that Churchill made his fortune as a poet. When he passed from players to politicians, — from the theatre to the great stage of public life, — his subjects were inexhaustible. The poem¹⁸ which contains most of his better mind, was the least personal of all his productions, and for that reason

¹⁷ Speaking of a recent illness to Mr. Newton, (Sept. 8, 1783,) he says, "I was in no degree delirious, nor has any thing less than a fever really dangerous ever made me so. In this respect, if in no other, I may be said to have a strong head; and perhaps for the same reason, that wine would never make me drunk, an ordinary degree of fever has no effect upon my understanding."

¹⁸ *Gotham*. Cowper admired this poem greatly. Speaking of one of Churchill's biographers, "a pitiful scribbler, who seems to have undertaken that task for which he was entirely unqualified, because it afforded him an opportunity to traduce him," and who had called this piece a catchpenny, he says, "*Gotham*, unless I am a greater blockhead than he, which I am far from believing, is a noble and beautiful poem, and a poem with which, I make no doubt, the author took as much pains as with any he ever wrote. Making allowance (and Dryden, perhaps, in his *Absalom* and *Achitophel*, stands in need of the same indulgence) for an unwarrantable use of Scripture, it appears to me to be a masterly performance." — To Mr. Unwin, (no date.)

The life here spoken of is in Bell's Collection of the British Poets, the first in which Churchill was included.

it had the least sale. The fault was never repeated. He made hay while the sun shone, writing as fast as the impulse moved him, and publishing as fast as he wrote. No man knew better that though the capability of becoming a poet is the gift of nature, the art of poetry requires no ordinary pains ; but he submitted to none himself. Blotting and correcting were his abhorrence ; he said it was "like cutting away one's own flesh." The energetic expression was remembered by his publisher, and by him repeated to Mr. D'Israeli ; who heard (probably from the same authentic source) "that after a successful work, he usually precipitated the publication of another, relying on its crudeness being passed over by the public curiosity which was excited by its better brother. He called this getting double pay. But Churchill," says Mr. D'Israeli, "was spendthrift of fame, and enjoyed all his revenue while he lived. Posterity owes him little, and pays him nothing."¹⁹

His satires, indeed, would have slept, perhaps, with their heroes, if they had not been luckily included in Bell's edition of the British Poets, — the first general collection, which, though made with little judgment, and less knowledge, has been followed in this respect by subsequent collections, Johnson's only excepted ; but in the supplement to Johnson's, Churchill was included, and is now considered as a regular member of the corporation of poets. To this rank he is fairly entitled. And though it might seem that his poems, for their subjects' sake, might properly be relegated among those which formerly used, from time to time, to be collected under the title of State-Poems, they are too good for this. Manly sense is their characteristic, deriving strength of expression from indignation ; and they contain redeeming passages of sound morality and permanent truth. No such ingredients enter into the old collections ; there, indeed, much occasional vigor is to be found, and wit in abundance ; but to characterize them generally as libellous and malignant would be to employ weak and inadequate words ; they are receptacles of ordure and venom. Such collections must be consulted by those who

¹⁹ *Curiosities of Literature*, vol. iii. p. 129, edit. 1833.

would thoroughly understand the history and the spirit of the times to which they belong : Churchill also will have some readers of that class ; but he will have more among the students of English poetry and of English literature.

While Churchill, having honorably discharged his debts, was making a provision for his family from the produce of his rapid pen, Lloyd, whose facility in composition was equal, who stood high in reputation, whose talents were of no common order, and whose industry never shrunk from its daily task, was sinking lower and lower as a literary drudge. After conducting the poetical department of a periodical publication, entitled the Library, and publishing a quarto volume of poems, for which he obtained a considerable number of subscribers, he engaged to edit the St. James's Magazine, the first number of which appeared in September, 1762, with his name on the cover ; on this it seems the publisher insisted ; and Lloyd, if he did not feel the cogency of his arguments,²⁰ felt that of his authority. Both counted upon the aid of Lloyd's literary friends.

BOOKSELLER.

You'll have assistance, and the best.
There's Churchill, — will not Churchill lend
Assistance ?

AUTHOR.

Surely, to his FRIEND.

BOOKSELLER.

And then your interest might procure
Something from either CONNOISSEUR.

20

BOOKSELLER.

— a name will always bring
A better sanction to the thing ;
And all your scribbling foes are such
Their censure cannot hurt you much ;
And take the matter ne'er so ill,
If *you* don't print it, sir, they will.

AUTHOR.

Well, be it so. That struggle's o'er :
Nay, this shall prove one spur the more,
Pleased if success attends ; if not,
I've writ my name, and made a blot.
The Puff : Introductory Dial.

Colman and Thornton both will join
 Their social hand, to strengthen thine :
 And when your name appears in print,
 Will Garrick *never* drop a hint?

AUTHOR.

True, I've indulged such hopes before,
 From those you name, and many more ;
 And they, perhaps, again will join
 Their hand, if not ashamed of mine.
 Bold is the task we undertake :
 The friends we wish, the work must make ;
 For wits, like adjectives, are known
 To cling to that which stands alone.

If Lloyd was disappointed in the hopes of assistance which he thus publicly advertised, it was because they could not possibly be realized to the desired extent. He received more than might have been expected. Some contributions seem to have come from Colman ; considerable ones, certainly, from Thornton ; none from Churchill, who had no time to spare, but who assisted him more effectually in another way. The chief contributor was Charles Denis, to whom the first volume was dedicated, "in acknowledgment of favors received." Denis was an imitator of La-fontaine ; and upon this writer and Hall Stevenson, Dr. Wolcott, popularly known in the last generation as Peter Pindar, formed his style. Wolcott had more wit and more originality ; but as indecency of one kind was not marketable in his days among the general public, he seasoned his pieces with another, and directed his personal ridicule against individuals whose character or station was such that he was in no danger of receiving personal chastisement.

One communication to the *St. James's Magazine*²¹ may be ascribed to Cowper ; it is a Dissertation on the Modern Ode, signed with his initials. "A perfect Ode," composed upon the ironical directions therein given, is promised by the writer ; and such an ode appeared in a subsequent number,²² evidently by the same person, though signed

²¹ Vol. ii. April, 1763, pp. 118—125.

²² Vol. iii. Nov. 1763, pp. 187—9. It is signed L. ; but L. is evidently the same person as W. C., and I have therefore inserted the Ode among the additional notes to this volume.

with a different initial. No earlier communication of his can be traced there; and there is none later, because when the ode appeared the crisis of his fate was at hand.

The task of supplying a monthly magazine by his own exertions, with only eleemosynary assistance, was too much for Lloyd, even with all his power of application and facility in composition. The publisher brought to his aid, in the first number, an easy resource, on which probably both had relied. "Though the author," he said, "had in his preliminary poem²³ disclaimed any assistance but the *Belles Lettres*, and chiefly depended upon the Muses, who are not always in a humor to be propitious to their suitors, it was presumed that it could be neither unacceptable to him, nor disagreeable to the reader, to vary the entertainment, and to give the most material occurrences of the month, both foreign and domestic." But this was so ill received, that it was immediately discontinued. Bonnell Thornton then came kindly to his aid. "Old friend,"²⁴ said he, "give me leave to congratulate your readers on the improvement which you made in your last Magazine, in not retailing stale paragraphs of news, but supplying their places with original matter; though by so doing you imposed upon yourself a further task of providing materials for another half sheet. I am sensible of the difficulty you must naturally be under, in being obliged to furnish such a quantity of copy for the printer every month; it is therefore incumbent on your friends and well-wishers to ease you in some measure of the burden. One part of your plan, indeed, is admirably calculated for this purpose, and might prove a great saving to you, if properly attended to. Though we cannot all of us be writers, we may yet contribute greatly to the success as well as merit of your undertaking, by communicating such originals as must secure attention from the very name of their authors. Many such are undoubtedly preserved in the private cabinets of the curious, and in the public libraries and repositories." This letter he accompanied with two poems attributed to Dryden, and till then unpublished.

²³ The Puff.

²⁴ Vol. i. Nov. 1762, p. 188.

Already, Lloyd began to feel the thralldom to which he had bound himself. Even in the second number, these melancholy lines are found: —

Oh! had it pleased my wiser betters
That I had never tasted letters,
Then no Parnassian maggots, bred
Like fancies in a madman's head,
No graspings at an idle name,
No childish hope of future fame,
No impotence of wit, had ta'en
Possession of my muse-struck brain.

Or had my birth, with fortune fit,
Varnished the dunce or made the wit,
I had not held a shameful place,
Nor letters paid me with disgrace.

O for a pittance of my own,
That I might live unsought, unknown,
Retired from all the pedant strife,
Far from the cares of bustling life;
Far from the wits, the fools, the great,
And all the little world I hate! ²⁸

When the far greater part of poor Lloyd's poems shall be forgotten, as they may be without injury to his memory or to literature, the passages in which he describes his own drudgery ought always to be preserved for a warning: —

While duly each revolving moon,
Which often comes, God knows, too soon,
Continual plagues my soul molest,
And Magazines disturb my rest;
While scarce a night I steal to bed
Without a couplet in my head;
And in the morning, when I stir,
Pop comes a Devil — "Copy, sir!"
I cannot strive with daring flight
To reach the brave Parnassian height,
But at its foot content to stray,
In easy, unambitious way,
Pick up those flowers the Muses send,
To make a nosegay for my friend.
In short, I lay no idle claim
To genius strong and noisy fame;

²⁸ Vol. i. p. 90.

But with a hope and wish to please,
I write, as I would live, with ease.

FRIEND.

But you must have a fund, a mine,
Prose, poems, letters, —

AUTHOR.

Not a line!

And here, my friend, I rest secure —
He can't lose much who's always poor.
And if, as now, through numbers five,
This work, with pleasure kept alive,
Can still its currency afford,
Nor fear the breaking of its hoard,
Can pay you, as at sundry times,
For *self*, per *Mag*, two thousand rhymes,
From whence should apprehension grow,
That *self* should fail with richer Co? ²⁶

No *doer* of a monthly grub,
Myself *alone* a learned *club*,
I ask my readers to no treat
Of scientific hashed-up meat,
Nor seek to please theatric friends
With scraps of plays and odds and ends. ²⁷

Yet after this false demonstration of cheerfulness, the same poem contains a confession, that he felt both the weight and the degradation ²⁸ of his task: —

²⁶ It seems from hence, that he had some stated assistance at this time; but nothing appears to show it.

²⁷ Vol. i. p. 375, 376.

²⁸ His friends felt this for him; one of them says: —

Behold, in monthly drudgery misemployed,
The wit and classic elegance of Lloyd.
How shall the bard bring fancy, doomed to eke
With sense or nonsense through five sheets the week?
How shall he wait for those auspicious hours,
When the Muse beckons to Parnassian bowers,
And, as crewhile, informs the happy strain
With all the native ease of Flaccus' vein?
The merciless exactors, on demand,
Instant as those who Israel's servile band
Plied with Egyptian toils, no pity show;
Or smooth or turbid, still the verse must flow:
The poet's fancy, like their porter's back,
They think is ever ready for the pack.
They never felt persuasive fancy's beam
Dart on the raptured mind the enlivening gleam;
In vain the absence of the Muse you plead,
The quota must be furnished as decreed;
Thus jaded genius writes what it must blush to read.

Lloyd printed these lines in his Magazine, only leaving a blank in the place of his own name. Vol. ii. p. 197.

For me, once fond of author-fame,
 Now forced to bear its weight and shame,
 I have no time to run a race ;
 A traveller's my only pace.
 They, whom their steeds unjaded bear
 About Hyde Park, to take the air,
 May frisk and prance, and ride their fill,
 And go all paces, which they will.
 We *hackney* tits, — nay, never smile, —
 Who trot our stage of *thirty* mile,
 Must travel in a constant plan,
 And run our journey as we can.²⁹

The same obvious metaphor was continued in another piece, when he, poor man, had nearly reached the end of his stage : —

At first the poet idly strays
 Along the greensward path of praise,
 Till on his journeys up and down,
 To see and to be seen in town,
 What with ill-natured flings and rubs
 From flippant bucks and *hackney* scrubs,
 His toils through dust, through dirt, through gravel,
 Take off his appetite for travel.

These lines were written after he had ceased to conduct the Magazine, and were addressed to Dr. Kenrick, who succeeded him as editor. During eighteen months he had continued to fulfil his monthly task, though at length in such exhaustion of means and spirits, that he seems to have admitted any communication, however worthless, or reprehensible in a worse way. But his whole dependence had been upon this adventure. The first paper with which Thornton had supplied him, was one composed upon the thought that the greater part of mankind, if they had as many lives (according to the common saying) as a cat, would wantonly throw away the eight, however careful some of them might be to preserve the last. Pursuing this fancy through various examples, he presented one which, if it excited no forebodings in Lloyd upon its first perusal, must have been recollected by him in bitterness at last.

"Suppose, again, (for there can be no end of such like suppositions,) that I am an author; my works, indeed, I flatter myself, will live after me; but though I had all the lives of a cat, through each of them I might lead the life of a dog. My garret (we will say) has inspired me to soar so high as to attempt a sublime ode, or epic poem. I am let down by its want of sale: the beam across my chamber is very inviting, and at least the bed cords are remaining. I am afterwards lowered to humble prose: my publisher will not afford me small beer; and I choose to have my fill of water by a plunge into the river Thames. After sinking and rising, we will suppose, for eight times alternately, I at last sit down contented in a jail, to supply copy, scrap by scrap, as the printer's little imp calls for it; since, as the proverb has it, 'He must needs go when the devil drives.'"³⁰

In the condition here described as the last stage of a hackney writer, Lloyd found himself after his failure with the Magazine; he was arrested for debts contracted during its progress, and it must be presumed either that they were beyond his father's ability to discharge, or that his imprudent habits were deemed incorrigible, or that it was hoped he might be brought, by confinement, to a better mind; for Dr. Lloyd, who had so benevolently interposed to save Churchill from imprisonment, did not procure his son's enlargement, and he has never been charged with want of parental feeling on that score. And now Churchill's friendship was shown. On his return from a summer excursion in Wales, with his mistress, whom he now considered as a left-handed wife, united to him by moral ties, he hastened to the Fleet prison, provided for his immediate wants, supplied him with a guinea a week, as well as a servant; and endeavored to raise a subscription for the purpose of extricating him from his embarrassments. Lloyd was not wanting to himself; he continued to drudge as before; completed, with Denis's assistance, a translation of Marmontel's *Contes Moraux*, which had been commenced in the Magazine, and performed any miserable work on which

³⁰ St. James's Mag. vol. i. p. 140,

the booksellers would employ him. Whatever his reflections might be, he expressed no sorrow for the folly he had committed in throwing himself upon the world as an author: "confinement was irksome enough," he said, "but not so bad as being usher at Westminster." Yet this strain shows that he had his bitter thoughts:

The harlot muse, so passing gay,
 Bewitches only to betray.
 Though, for a while, with easy air,
 She smooths the rugged brow of care,
 And laps the mind in flowery dreams,
 With fancy's transitory gleams;
 Fond of the nothings she bestows,
 We wake, at last, to real woes.
 Through every age, in every place,
 Consider well the poet's case;
 By turns protected and caressed,
 Defamed, dependent, and distressed.
 The joke of wits, the bane of slaves,
 The curse of fools, the butt of knaves;
 Too proud to stoop for servile ends,
 To lackey rogues or flatter friends;
 With prodigality to give,
 Too careless of the means to live;
 The bubble fame intent to gain,
 And yet too lazy to maintain;
 He quits the world he never prized,
 Pitied by few, by more despised,
 And lost to friends, oppressed by foes,
 Sinks to the nothing whence he rose.
 O glorious trade! for wit's a trade,
 Where men are ruined more than made!
 Let crazy Lee, neglected Gay,
 The shabby Otway, Dryden gray,
 Those tuneful servants of the Nine,
 (Not that I blend their names²¹ with mine,)
 Repeat their lives, their works, their fame,
 And teach the world some useful shame.

²¹ Churchill connected it with a far greater than any of these: —

twenty fools of note
 Start up, and from report Mæcenas quote.
 They mention him as if to use his name
 Was in some measure to partake his fame,
 Though Virgil, was he living, in the street
 Might rot for them, or perish in the Fleet.
 See how they redden, and the charge disclaim!
 Virgil, and in the Fleet! forbid it, shame! —
 Hence, ye vain boasters, to the Fleet repair,
 And ask, — with blushes ask, — if Lloyd is there!

The scheme for releasing him by means of a subscription failed, and was so managed, or mismanaged, as to produce a breach with Thornton and Colman, upon whom, especially the former,³² much obloquy has been cast on this account. The Magazine, however, had been disgraced with so much ribaldry and rubbish, and such grossly offensive personalities before it was transferred to another editor, that a regard to their own characters might have produced some coolness upon their part towards one with whom it was no longer creditable to be associated in public opinion; and as he was connecting himself more closely with Wilkes, they may perhaps also have deemed it no longer safe. Garrick and Hogarth are in like manner charged with having "coolly abandoned him to his fate," though he had "so frequently berhymed and bepraised them." But Hogarth was then at open war with Wilkes and Churchill; and Garrick was endeavoring at that very time to render Lloyd an essential service in his own way, by bringing out at Drury Lane a comic opera, which he had manufactured from the French.

This piece, called "The Capricious Lovers," was represented for the first time on the 28th of November, 1764,

³² In the last edition of Churchill's works it is said, "His confinement was the more irksome, owing to the circumstance of his bosom friend and prime seducer from the paths of prudence, Bonnell Thornton, refusing to become his security for the liberty of the rules. This giving rise to some ill-natured altercation, further irritated Thornton, who became an inveterate enemy, in the quality of his most inexorable creditor." Vol. ii. p. 347.

Now Thornton could not have been his seducer at school, because there was nine years' difference in age between them; nor at college, because they were not of the same university; and if Lloyd did not lead so licentious a life at Cambridge as to be noted for it, his biographers have belied him. That part of the charge against Thornton, therefore, is disposed of; and that it should have been made with so little reflection, affords reason for hoping that the remaining charges may have as little foundation. Lloyd says, in a letter to Wilkes, after Churchill's death, "Thornton is *what you thought him*. I have many acquaintances, but now no friend here." That they were alienated from each other is certain, and that Lloyd had learned to think ill of him; but when Thornton is spoken of as an inexorable creditor, it may be suspected that because he had done much, more was expected from him; and that when he had gone as far or farther than his own means could well afford, he found himself like the man in the old print, who, having lent his money to his friend, lost both in consequence.

with some applause ; its success or failure was then alike indifferent to the unhappy author ; for on the 4th of that month, Churchill, who had gone to Boulogne, there to meet Wilkes, was cut off by a miliary fever. Lloyd had been apprized of his danger ; but when the news of his death was somewhat abruptly announced to him as he was sitting at dinner, he was seized with a sudden sickness, and saying, "I shall follow poor Charles," took to his bed, from which he never rose again ; dying, if ever man did, of a broken heart. The tragedy did not end here : Churchill's favorite sister, who is said to have possessed much of her brother's sense, and spirit, and genius, and to have been betrothed to Lloyd, attended him during his illness ; and, sinking under the double loss, soon followed her brother and her lover to the grave.

CHAPTER V.

COWPER'S LITERARY AMUSEMENTS IN THE TEMPLE. RISE AND PROGRESS OF HIS INSANITY, AS RELATED BY HIMSELF.

DURING his residence in the Temple, Cowper, though he exercised himself in only the lighter branches of composition, took more than ordinary pains to keep up his classical knowledge. While the greater part of his schoolfellows forgot at College (like their peers there) the little they had learnt at school, he, who was apparently an idler, and was considered such by others, and perhaps considered himself so, was unconsciously preparing himself for the great literary labor of his life.

He had read through the Iliad and Odyssey at Westminster with Sutton, afterwards Sir Richard ; and it is a proof of the good instinct and good sense which guided him in the choice of his friends, that he should have associated himself in his private studies with the youth of whom higher expectations were formed than of any of his contemporaries, and who was not more remarkable for abilities and attain-

ments than for his amiable manners and excellent disposition. He went through these poems again in the Temple with a friend, Alston by name, and compared Pope's translation throughout with the original. They were not long in discovering "that there is hardly the thing in the world of which Pope was so entirely destitute as a taste for Homer:" nevertheless they persevered in the comparison, though so disgusted at finding, "when they looked for the simplicity and majesty of Homer in his English representation, puerile conceits instead, extravagant metaphors, and the tinsel of modern embellishment in every possible position," that they were often on the point of burning the meretricious version. Little less than thirty years afterwards, Cowper reminded a fellow Templar, who had been familiar with Alston and himself, of their Homeric studies, and telling him that the recollection of those studies had led him to undertake his own translation, he observed, "We are strange creatures, my little friend; every thing that we do is in reality important, though half that we do seems to be push-pin: consequences follow that were never dreamt of."¹

Homeric as his taste was at this time, Cowper nevertheless assisted his brother in translating the *Henriade* into heroic couplets for some periodical work. The translation did not extend beyond eight books, of which he supplied four, and his brother received twenty guineas for their joint labors. Cowper attached so little value to this performance, that he had forgotten the extent of his own contribution; but it was brought back to his recollection three or four and twenty years afterwards by an accurate statement in the *Gentleman's Magazine*.²

But sad thoughts were now crowding upon Cowper. He was now in the thirty-second year of his age, his patrimony was well-nigh spent, and (to use his own words) there was

¹ Letter to Clotworthy Rowley, Esq. Feb. 21, 1788.

² Letter to Lady Hesketh, Jan. 16, 1786. He had again forgotten the amount when he mentioned the subject to Hayley. Hayley had discovered a rival, and he thought probably an inferior translation, published, as this is supposed to have been, in a *Magazine*; but the version of the two brothers he was unable to find. That which he found is likely to be one in which Lloyd was engaged, the first canto of such a translation being published in his works.

no appearance that he should ever repair the damage by a fortune of his own getting. He began to be a little apprehensive of approaching want; and under that apprehension, talking one day of his affairs with a friend, he expressed his hope that if the clerk of the journals of the House of Lords should die, his kinsman Major Cowper, who had the place in his disposal, would give him the appointment. "We both agreed," says he, "that the business of the place being transacted in private would exactly suit me; and both expressed an earnest wish for his death, that I might be provided for. Thus did I covet what God had commanded me not to covet; and involved myself in still deeper guilt by doing it in the spirit of a murderer. It pleased the Lord to give me my heart's desire, and in it and with it an immediate punishment of my crime."

This is a passage which might be quoted to illustrate "that mood of mind which exaggerates, and still more greatly mistakes the inward depravation of man."³ Nothing can be more certain than that when Cowper chose the law for his profession, both his father and himself reckoned upon their family patronage as one reason for this choice. In the ordinary and proper course of things it would be bestowed upon him. The fault which Cowper had committed (grievous enough for its probable consequences to be called a sin) was that of neglecting those professional studies by which he might not only have maintained himself till the contingency should fall, but render himself independent of it if any unforeseen event should disappoint his reasonable expectations. That the wish whereof he accuses himself amounted to any thing more than what every one feels who looks for promotion by seniority, or for any other advantage accruing upon the decease of some person whose death would otherwise be to him a matter of mere indifference, is what no one can believe. Common nature is not so depraved as to form murderous wishes for such motives. But when Cowper wrote the narrative of what have been called "the most remarkable and interesting parts of his life," and detailed therein "the exercises

³ Coleridge's Table Talk, vol. i. p. 175.

of his mind in regard to religion," "for the gratification," as has been said, "of his most intimate and pious friends," the train of thought to which he was led tended greatly to induce a return of the malady, over the remains of which those injudicious friends encouraged him thus to brood.

The clerk of the journals died, as had probably been expected, shortly afterwards; and at the same time the joint offices of reading clerk and clerk of the committees, which were of much greater value than the clerkship of the journals, were vacated by resignation. Major Cowper, "the patentee of these appointments," fulfilled on this occasion the expectations which had always been entertained. "I pray God to bless him," says Cowper, "for his benevolent intention to serve me. He called me out of my chambers, and having invited me to take a turn with him in the garden, there made me an offer of the two most profitable places; intending the other for his friend Mr. Arnold. Dazzled by so splendid a proposal, and not immediately reflecting upon my incapacity to execute a business of so public a nature, I at once accepted it; but at the same time (such was the will of Him whose hand was in the whole matter) seemed to receive a dagger in my heart. The wound was given, and every moment added to the smart of it. All the considerations, by which I endeavored to compose my mind to its former tranquillity, did but torment me the more; proving miserable comforters and counsellors of no value. I returned to my chambers thoughtful and unhappy: my countenance fell; and my friend was astonished, instead of that additional cheerfulness he might so reasonably expect, to find an air of deep melancholy in all I said or did.

"Having been harassed in this manner by day and night for the space of a week, perplexed between the apparent folly of casting away the only visible chance I had of being well provided for, and the impossibility of retaining it, I determined at length to write a letter to my friend, though he lodged in a manner at the next door, and we generally spent the day together. I did so, and therein begged him to accept my resignation, and to appoint Mr. Arnold to the places he had given me, and permit me to succeed Mr. Arnold. I was well aware of the disproportion between the

value of his appointment and mine ; but my peace was gone ; pecuniary advantages were not equivalent to what I had lost ; and I flattered myself, that the clerkship of the journals would fall fairly and easily within the scope of my abilities. Like a man in a fever, I thought a change of posture would relieve my pain ; and, as the event will show, was equally disappointed. At length I carried my point, my friend, in this instance, preferring the gratification of my desires to his own interest ; for nothing could be so likely to bring a suspicion of bargain and sale upon his nomination, which the Lords would not have endured, as his appointment of so near a relative to the least profitable office, while the most valuable was allotted to a stranger.

“ The matter being thus settled, something like a calm took place in my mind. I was, indeed, not a little concerned about my character, being aware that it must needs suffer by the strange appearance of my proceeding. This, however, being but a small part of the anxiety I had labored under, was hardly felt, when the rest was taken off. I thought my path to an easy maintenance was now plain and open, and for a day or two was tolerably cheerful. But, behold, the storm was gathering all the while ; and the fury of it was not the less violent, for this gleam of sunshine.

“ In the beginning, a strong opposition to my friend's right of nomination began to show itself. A powerful party was formed among the Lords to thwart it, in favor of an old enemy of the family, though one much indebted to its bounty ; and it appeared plain, that if we succeeded at last, it would only be by fighting our ground by inches. Every advantage, I was told, would be sought for, and eagerly seized, to disconcert us. I was bid to expect an examination at the bar of the house, touching my sufficiency for the post I had taken. Being necessarily ignorant of the nature of that business, it became expedient that I should visit the office daily, in order to qualify myself for the strictest scrutiny. All the horror of my fears and perplexities now returned. A thunderbolt would have been as welcome to me as this intelligence. I knew, to demonstration, that upon these terms the clerkship of the journals was no place for

me. To require my attendance at the bar of the house, that I might there publicly entitle myself to the office, was, in effect, to exclude me from it. In the mean time, the interest of my friend, the honor of his choice, my own reputation and circumstances, all urged me forward ; all pressed me to undertake that which I saw to be impracticable. They whose spirits are formed like mine, to whom a public exhibition of themselves, on any occasion, is mortal poison, may have some idea of the horrors of my situation ; others can have none.

“ My continual misery at length brought on a nervous fever : quiet forsook me by day, and peace by night ; a finger raised against me, was more than I could stand against. In this posture of mind, I attended regularly at the office ; where, instead of a soul upon the rack, the most active spirits were essentially necessary for my purpose. I expected no assistance from any body there, all the inferior clerks being under the influence of my opponent ; and accordingly I received none. The journal books were indeed thrown open to me ; a thing which could not be refused ; and from which, perhaps, a man in health, and with a head turned to business, might have gained all the information he wanted ; but it was not so with me. I read without perception, and was so distressed, that had every clerk in the office been my friend, it could have availed me little ; for I was not in a condition to receive instruction, much less to elicit it out of manuscripts, without direction. Many months went over me thus employed ; constant in the use of means, despairing as to the issue.

“ The feelings of a man, when he arrives at the place of execution, are probably much like mine, every time I set my foot in the office, which was every day, for more than half a year together.

“ At length, the vacation being pretty far advanced, I made shift to get into the country, and repaired to Margate.”

One of his letters written at this time, and only one, has been preserved ; it was to his cousin Harriet, whose name will be inseparably and most honorably associated with his as long as his shall be remembered, and who was then the wife of Sir Thomas Hesketh.

TO LADY HESKETH.

MY DEAR COUSIN,

The Temple, Aug. 9, 1763.

Having promised to write to you, I make haste to be as good as my word. I have a pleasure in writing to you at any time, but especially at the present, when my days are spent in reading the journals, and my nights in dreaming of them. An employment not very agreeable to a head that has long been habituated to the luxury of choosing its subject, and has been as little employed upon business, as if it had grown upon the shoulders of a much wealthier gentleman. But the numskull pays for it now, and will not presently forget the discipline it has undergone lately. If I succeed in this doubtful piece of promotion, I shall have at least this satisfaction to reflect upon, that the volumes I write will be treasured up with the utmost care for ages, and will last as long as the English constitution, — a duration which ought to satisfy the vanity of any author who has a spark of love for his country. Oh! my good cousin! if I was to open my heart to you, I could show you strange sights; nothing, I flatter myself, that would shock you, but a great deal that would make you wonder. I am of a very singular temper, and very unlike all the men that I have ever conversed with. Certainly I am not an absolute fool; but I have more weakness than the greatest of all the fools I can recollect at present. In short, if I was as fit for the next world, as I am unfit for this, — and God forbid I should speak it in vanity, — I would not change conditions with any saint in Christendom.

My destination is settled at last, and I have obtained a furlough. Margate is the word, and what do you think will ensue, cousin? I know what you expect; but ever since I was born I have been good at disappointing the most natural expectations. Many years ago, cousin, there was a possibility I might prove a very different thing from what I am at present. My character is now fixed, and riveted fast upon me; and, between friends, is not a very splendid one, or likely to be guilty of much fascination.

Adieu, my dear cousin! So much as I love you, I wonder how the deuce it has happened I was never in love with you.

Thank Heaven, that I never was, for at this time I have had a pleasure in writing to you, which in that case I should have forfeited. Let me hear from you, or I shall reap but half the reward that is due to my noble indifference.

Yours ever, and evermore,

W. C.

This letter is interesting not merely because it bears the stamp of Cowper's peculiar and admirable talent; it is important as containing his own view of his own character at that time. He tells his cousin that if she could look into his heart she would see strange sights there, much that would make her wonder, but nothing that would shock her.

At Margate he began presently to recover his spirits; this amendment he imputed to the effects of a new scene, to an intermission of his painful employment, and to cheerful company, — which, throughout life, while any thing availed, was of all things most beneficial to him. Yet for some time, though the day had passed cheerfully and without any disturbing recollection of his fears, his first waking thoughts in the morning, he says, were horrible; and he "looked forward to the winter, and regretted the flight of every moment that brought it nearer, like a man borne away by a rapid torrent into a strong sea, whence he sees no possibility of returning, and where he knows he cannot subsist." Present circumstances, however, prevailed over his insane apprehensions; and the progress of the disease was suspended till he returned to town.

About the beginning of October he was again required to attend the office, and prepare for what he called "the push." But no sooner had he resumed, or seemed to resume, his ineffectual labors, — labors which were ineffectual only because he was possessed with the persuasion that they necessarily must be so, — than his misery and his madness (for such indeed it was) returned.

Again, he says, "I felt myself pressed by necessity on either side, with nothing but despair in prospect. To this dilemma was I reduced, — either to keep possession of the office to the last extremity, and by so doing expose myself to a public rejection for insufficiency, (for the little knowl-

edge I had acquired would have quite forsaken me at the bar of the house;) or else to fling it up at once, and by this means run the hazard of ruining my benefactor's right of appointment, by bringing his discretion into-question. In this situation, such a fit of passion has sometimes seized me, when alone in my chambers, that I have cried out aloud, and cursed the hour of my birth; lifting up my eyes to heaven, at the same time, not as a suppliant, but in the hellish spirit of rancorous reproach and blasphemy against my Maker. A thought would sometimes come across my mind, that my sins had perhaps brought this distress upon me,—that the hand of divine vengeance was in it; but in the pride of my heart I presently acquitted myself, and thereby implicitly charged God with injustice, saying, 'What sins have I committed to deserve this?'

"I saw plainly that God alone could deliver me; but was firmly persuaded that he would not, and therefore omitted to ask it. Indeed at *his* hands I would not; but as Saul sought to the witch, so did I to the physician, Dr. Heberden; and was as diligent in the use of drugs as if they would have healed my wounded spirit, or have made the rough places plain before me. I made, indeed, one effort of a devotional kind; for having found a prayer or two in that repository of self-righteousness and pharisaical lumber, 'the Whole Duty of Man,' I said them a few nights, but with so little expectation of prevailing that way, that I soon laid aside the book, and with it all thoughts of God and hopes of a remedy."

In his better mind, or under the influence of a more tolerant spiritual director, Cowper would not have spoken thus unjustly and uncharitably of a good old book, which contains the substance of a course of sermons addressed in the plainest language to plain people, and setting before them those duties, which they are called upon to perform in the ordinary course of life. The author was a person of sound judgment and sober piety, who sought to make his parishioners practical Christians, and not professing ones: and that he was humble-minded himself there is conclusive proof; for he concealed his name, and no inquiries have ever yet been able to ascertain it. If the book appeared to

Cowper stale and unprofitable, it was because it told him nothing but what he knew before; and still more, because it was intended for sane minds. It was like wholesome food to a sick stomach, or a cup of pure spring water to one who craves for drams. "I now," he says, "began to look upon madness as the only chance remaining. I had a strong foreboding that so it would fare with me, and I wished for it earnestly, and looked forward to it with impatient expectation!" Such forebodings and wishes were indications of the actual disease.

The seeds of that disease seem to have been lurking in him since its first manifestation, nearly fourteen years before this time. According to his own account, his recovery had been instantaneous; and he thought he could remember that he had ascribed it, at the time, to God's gracious acceptance of his prayers; but Satan, and his own wicked heart, he said, persuaded him that natural means had effected a natural cure, and the blessing was thus converted into a poison." There is a well-known saying, that the greater the sinner, the greater the saint. Perhaps no one ever drew up a narrative of his own conversion, without unconsciously seeking to exemplify that saying in his own case, by exaggerating his former depravity, for the sake of making the change appear the greater, and enhancing the miracle of divine favor; and this is done as well by those who deceive themselves, as by those who are wilfully deceiving others. Cowper represents himself as having lived in an uninterrupted course of sin, till he had obtained a complete victory over his own conscience. Sometimes, indeed, a question would arise in his mind whether it were safe to proceed in a course so utterly condemned in the word of God; he saw that it must inevitably end in destruction if the gospel were true; but he saw not by what means he might change his Ethiopian complexion, or overcome such an inveterate habit of rebellion against God. The truth is, that his conscience, when he represents it as stupefied or stunned, was at that very time in a state of morbid activity.

His associates, he says, were either professed Christians, like himself, — that is to say, persons with whom religion was nothing more than a barren belief, — or professed infi-

dels. He was troubled with no doubts, for he had not only been well instructed in the grounds of his faith, but had always been an industrious and diligent inquirer into the external evidence by which Christianity is supported. When he was in company with scoffers, and heard them blaspheme the gospel, he never failed to maintain its truth vehemently, and with the confidence of one who knew the strength of his cause. "I think," said he, "I at one time went so far into a controversy of this kind as to assert that I would willingly have my right hand cut off, so that I might be enabled to live according to the gospel. Thus I have been employed when half-intoxicated, in vindicating the truth of Scripture, in the very act of rebellion against its dictates. Lamentable inconsistency of convinced judgment with an unsanctified heart! An inconsistency visible to others as well as myself; insomuch, that a deistical friend of mine cut short the matter by alleging, that if what I said were true, I was certainly damned by my own choosing."

That thought, indeed, tormented him. There was nothing in his heart which would have shocked the most tender of his friends, if its secrets had been disclosed; this was the fair testimony which he gave, when capable of giving it; but there was a want of that peace which passeth all understanding. A notion occurred to him, that were he but convinced it were worth while to obey the gospel, obedience would presently follow; but "having (in his own words) no reason to expect a miracle, and not hoping to be satisfied with any thing less, he acquiesced at length in favor of this devilish conclusion, that the only course he could take for securing his present peace, was to wrestle hard against the prospect of future misery, and resolve to banish all thoughts upon a subject on which he had thought to so little purpose." This is a state of mind which commonly ends in suicide or madness, unless the powerful stimulant of enthusiasm effect a cure. The crisis was accelerated in Cowper's case by the affair of the clerkship; but it would not have been long delayed. The prior and subsequent manifestations of the same disease prove that it was inherent in his constitution. The persuasion that it was impossible for him to qualify himself for an easy office was a symptom

of that disease; and when he hoped and expected that madness would put an end to all his perplexities, he was in fact insane. The sequel must be given in his own relation.

"My chief fear was, that my senses would not fail me time enough to excuse my appearance at the bar of the House of Lords, which was the only purpose I wanted it to answer. Accordingly the day of decision drew near, and I was still in my senses; though in my heart I had formed many wishes, and by word of mouth expressed many expectations to the contrary.

"Now came the grand temptation; the point to which Satan had all the while been driving me; the dark and hellish purpose of self-murder. I grew more sullen and reserved, fled from all society, even from my most intimate friends, and shut myself up in my chambers. The ruin of my fortune, the contempt of my relations and acquaintance, the prejudice I should do my patron, were all urged on me with irresistible energy. Being reconciled to the apprehension of madness, I began to be reconciled to the apprehension of death. Though formerly, in my happiest hours, I had never been able to glance a single thought that way, without shuddering at the idea of dissolution, I now wished for it, and found myself but little shocked at the idea of procuring it myself. Perhaps, thought I, there is no God; or if there be, the Scriptures may be false; if so, then God has no where forbidden suicide. I considered life as my property, and therefore at my own disposal. Men of great name, I observed, had destroyed themselves; and the world still retained the profoundest respect for their memories.

"But above all, I was persuaded to believe, that if the act were ever so unlawful, and even supposing Christianity to be true, my misery in hell itself would be more supportable. I well recollect too, that when I was about eleven years of age, my father desired me to read a vindication of self-murder, and give him my sentiments upon the question: I did so, and argued against it. My father heard my reasons, and was silent, neither approving or disapproving; from whence I inferred, that he sided with the author against me; though all the time, I believe, the true motive for his conduct was, that he wanted, if he could, to think

favorably of the state of a departed friend, who had some years before destroyed himself, and whose death had struck him with the deepest affliction. But this solution of the matter never once occurred to me, and the circumstance now weighed mightily with me.

"At this time, I fell into company, at a chop-house, with an elderly, well-looking gentleman, whom I had often seen there before, but had never spoken to. He began the discourse, and talked much of the miseries he had suffered. This opened my heart to him; I freely and readily took part in the conversation. At length, self-murder became the topic; and in the result, we agreed, that the only reason why some men were content to drag on their sorrows with them to the grave, and others were not, was, that the latter were endued with a certain indignant fortitude of spirit, teaching them to despise life, which the former wanted. Another person, whom I met at a tavern, told me that he had made up his mind about that matter, and had no doubt of his liberty to die as he saw convenient; though, by the way, the same person, who has suffered many and great afflictions since, is still alive. Thus were the emissaries of the throne of darkness let loose upon me. Blessed be the Lord, who has brought much good out of all this evil! This concurrence of sentiment, in men of sense, unknown to each other, I considered as a satisfactory decision of the question, and determined to proceed accordingly.

"One evening in November, 1763, as soon as it was dark, affecting as cheerful and unconcerned an air as possible, I went into an apothecary's shop, and asked for an half ounce phial of laudanum. The man seemed to observe me narrowly; but if he did, I managed my voice and countenance so as to deceive him. The day that required my attendance at the bar of the House being not yet come, and about a week distant, I kept my bottle close in my side-pocket, resolved to use it when I should be convinced there was no other way of escaping. This, indeed, seemed evident already; but I was willing to allow myself every possible chance of that sort, and to protract the horrid exe-

cution of my purpose, till the last moment ; but Satan was impatient of delay.

"The day before the period above mentioned arrived, being at Richards's coffee-house, at breakfast, I read the newspaper, and in it a letter, which the further I perused it, the more closely engaged my attention. I cannot now recollect the purport of it ; but before I had finished it, it appeared demonstratively true to me, that it was a libel, or satire, upon me. The author appeared to be acquainted with my purpose of self-destruction, and to have written that letter on purpose to secure and hasten the execution of it. My mind, probably, at this time, began to be disordered ; however it was, I was certainly given up to a strong delusion. I said within myself, ' Your cruelty shall be gratified ; you shall have your revenge ! ' and, flinging down the paper, in a fit of strong passion, I rushed hastily out of the room ; directing my way towards the fields, where I intended to find some house to die in ; or, if not, determined to poison myself in a ditch, when I could meet with one sufficiently retired.

"Before I had walked a mile in the fields, a thought struck me that I might yet spare my life ; that I had nothing to do, but to sell what I had in the funds, (which might be done in an hour,) go on board a ship, and transport myself to France. There, when every other way of maintenance should fail, I promised myself a comfortable asylum in some monastery, an acquisition easily made, by changing my religion. Not a little pleased with this expedient, I returned to my chambers, to pack up all that I could at so short a notice ; but while I was looking over my portmanteau, my mind changed again ; and self-murder was recommended to me once more in all its advantages.

"Not knowing where to poison myself, for I was liable to continual interruption in my chambers, from my laundress and her husband, I laid aside that intention, and resolved upon drowning. For that purpose, I immediately took a coach, and ordered the man to drive to Tower wharf, intending to throw myself into the river from the Custom House quay. It would be strange, should I omit to observe

here, how I was continually hurried away from such places as were most favorable to my design, to others, where it must be almost impossible to execute it ; — from the fields, where it was improbable that any thing should happen to prevent me, to the Custom House quay, where every thing of that kind was to be expected ; and this by a sudden impulse, which lasted just long enough to call me back again to my chambers, and was immediately withdrawn. Nothing ever appeared more feasible, than the project of going to France, till it had served its purpose, and then, in an instant, it appeared impracticable and absurd, even to a degree of ridicule.

“My life, which I had called my own, and claimed a right to dispose of, was kept for me by Him, whose property indeed it was, and who alone had a right to dispose of it. This is not the only occasion on which it is proper to make this remark ; others will offer themselves in the course of this narrative, so fairly, that the reader cannot overlook them.

“I left the coach upon the Tower wharf, intending never to return to it ; but upon coming to the quay, I found the water low, and a porter seated upon some goods there, as if on purpose to prevent me. This passage to the bottomless pit being mercifully shut against me, I returned back to the coach, and ordered it to return to the Temple. I drew up the shutters, once more had recourse to the laudanum, and determined to drink it off directly ; but God had otherwise ordained. A conflict, that shook me to pieces, suddenly took place ; not properly a trembling, but a convulsive agitation, which deprived me in a manner of the use of my limbs ; and my mind was as much shaken as my body.

“Distracted between the desire of death and the dread of it, twenty times I had the phial to my mouth, and as often received an irresistible check ; and even at the time it seemed to me that an invisible hand swayed the bottle downwards, as often as I set it against my lips. I well remember that I took notice of this circumstance with some surprise, though it effected no change in my purpose. Panting for breath, and in an horrible agony, I flung myself

back into the corner of the coach. A few drops of laudanum, which had touched my lips, besides the fumes of it, began to have a stupefying effect upon me. Regretting the loss of so fair an opportunity, yet utterly unable to avail myself of it, I determined not to live; and already half-dead with anguish, I once more returned to the Temple. Instantly I repaired to my room, and having shut both the outer and inner door, prepared myself for the last scene of the tragedy. I poured the laudanum into a small basin, set it on a chair by the bedside, half undressed myself, and laid down between the blankets, shuddering with horror at what I was about to perpetrate. I reproached myself bitterly with folly and rank cowardice, for having suffered the fear of death to influence me as it had done, and was filled with disdain at my own pitiful timidity: but still something seemed to overrule me, and to say, '*Think what you are doing! Consider, and live.*'

"At length, however, with the most confirmed resolution, I reached forth my hand towards the basin, when the fingers of both hands were as closely contracted, as if bound with a cord, and became entirely useless. Still, indeed, I could have made shift with both hands, dead and lifeless as they were, to have raised the basin to my mouth, for my arms were not at all affected; but this new difficulty struck me with wonder; it had the air of a divine interposition. I lay down in bed again to muse upon it, and while thus employed, heard the key turn in the outer door, and my laundress's husband came in. By this time the use of my fingers was restored to me: I started up hastily, dressed myself, hid the basin, and affecting as composed an air as I could, walked out into the dining-room. In a few minutes I was left alone; and now, unless God had evidently interposed for my preservation, I should certainly have done execution upon myself, having a whole afternoon before me.

"Both the man and his wife having gone out, outward obstructions were no sooner removed; than new ones arose within. The man had just shut the door behind him, when the convincing Spirit came upon me, and a total alteration in my sentiments took place. The horror of the

crime was immediately exhibited to me in so strong a light, that, being seized with a kind of furious indignation, I snatched up the basin, poured away the laudanum into a phial of foul water, and, not content with that, flung the phial out of the window. This impulse, having served the present purpose, was withdrawn.

"I spent the rest of the day in a kind of stupid insensibility; undetermined as to the manner of dying, but still bent on self-murder, as the only possible deliverance. That sense of the enormity of the crime, which I had just experienced, had entirely left me; and, unless my Eternal Father in Christ Jesus had interposed to disannul my covenant with death, and my agreement with hell, that I might hereafter be admitted into the covenant of mercy, I had, by this time, been a companion of devils, and the just object of his boundless vengeance.

"In the evening, a most intimate friend called upon me, and felicitated me on a happy resolution, which he had heard I had taken, to stand the brunt, and keep the office. I knew not whence this intelligence arose, but did not contradict it. We conversed awhile, with a real cheerfulness on his part, and an affected one on mine; and when he left me, I said in my heart, I shall see him no more!

"Behold, into what extremities a *good sort of man* may fall! Such was I, in the estimation of those who knew me best: a decent outside is all a good-natured world requires. Thus equipped, though all within be rank atheism, rottenness of heart, and rebellion against the blessed God, we are said to be good enough; and if *we* are damned, alas! who shall be saved? Reverse this charitable reflection, and say, If a *good sort of man* be saved, who then shall perish? and it comes much nearer the truth; but this is a hard saying, and the world cannot bear it.

"I went to bed to take, as I thought, my last sleep in this world. The next morning was to place me at the bar of the House, and I determined not to see it. I slept as usual, and awoke about three o'clock. Immediately I arose, and by the help of a rushlight, found my penknife, took it into bed with me, and lay with it for some hours directly pointed against my heart. Twice or thrice

I placed it upright under my left breast, leaning all my weight upon it; but the point was broken off square, and it would not penetrate.

"In this manner the time passed till the day began to break. I heard the clock strike seven, and instantly it occurred to me, there was no time to be lost: the chambers would soon be opened, and my friend would call upon me to take me with him to Westminster. 'Now is the time,' thought I; 'this is the crisis; no more dallying with the love of life!' I arose, and, as I thought, bolted the inner door of my chambers, but was mistaken; my touch deceived me, and I left it as I found it. My preservation, indeed, as it will appear, did not depend upon that incident; but I mention it, to show that the good providence of God watched over me, to keep open every way of deliverance, that nothing might be left to hazard.

"Not one hesitating thought now remained, but I fell greedily to the execution of my purpose. My garter was made of a broad piece of scarlet binding, with a sliding buckle, being sewn together at the ends: by the help of the buckle, I formed a noose, and fixed it about my neck, straining it so tight that I hardly left a passage for my breath, or for the blood to circulate; the tongue of the buckle held it fast. At each corner of the bed was placed a wreath of carved work, fastened by an iron pin, which passed up through the midst of it: the other part of the garter, which made a loop, I slipped over one of these, and hung by it some seconds, drawing up my feet under me, that they might not touch the floor; but the iron bent, and the carved work slipped off, and the garter with it. I then fastened it to the frame of the tester, winding it round, and tying it in a strong knot. The frame broke short, and let me down again.

"The third effort was more likely to succeed. I set the door open, which reached within a foot of the ceiling; by the help of a chair I could command the top of it, and the loop being large enough to admit a large angle of the door, was easily fixed so as not to slip off again. I pushed away the chair with my feet, and hung at my whole length. While I hung there, I distinctly heard a voice say three

times, *'Tis over !'* Though I am sure of the fact, and was so at the time, yet it did not at all alarm me, or affect my resolution. I hung so long that I lost all sense, all consciousness of existence.

"When I came to myself again, I thought myself in hell ; the sound of my own dreadful groans was all that I heard, and a feeling, like that produced by a flash of lightning, just beginning to seize upon me, passed over my whole body. In a few seconds I found myself fallen on my face to the floor. In about half a minute I recovered my feet ; and reeling, and staggering, stumbled into bed again.

"By the blessed providence of God, the garter which had held me till the bitterness of temporal death was past, broke just before eternal death had taken place upon me. The stagnation of the blood under one eye, in a broad crimson spot, and a red circle round my neck, showed plainly that I had been on the brink of eternity. The latter, indeed, might have been occasioned by the pressure of the garter ; but the former was certainly the effect of strangulation ; for it was not attended with the sensation of a bruise, as it must have been, had I, in my fall, received one in so tender a part. And I rather think the circle round my neck was owing to the same cause ; for the part was not excoriated, nor at all in pain.

"Soon after I got into bed, I was surprised to hear a noise in the dining-room, where the laundress was lighting a fire ; she had found the door unbolted, notwithstanding my design to fasten it, and must have passed the bed-chamber door while I was hanging on it, and yet never perceived me. She heard me fall, and presently came to ask me if I was well ; adding, she feared I had been in a fit.

"I sent her to a friend, to whom I related the whole affair, and despatched him to my kinsman, at the coffee-house. As soon as the latter arrived, I pointed to the broken garter, which lay in the middle of the room ; and apprized him also of the attempt I had been making.—His words were, 'My dear Mr. Cowper, you terrify me ! To be sure you cannot hold the office at this rate,—where is the deputation ?' I gave him the key of the drawer where it was deposited ; and his business requiring his immediate attendance, he took

it away with him ; and thus ended all my connection with the Parliament office.

“ To this moment I had felt no concern of a spiritual kind. Ignorant of original sin, insensible of the guilt of actual transgression, I understood neither the law nor the gospel ; the condemning nature of the one, nor the restoring mercies of the other. I was as much unacquainted with Christ, in all his saving offices, as if his blessed name had never reached me. Now, therefore, a new scene opened upon me. Conviction of sin took place, especially of that just committed ; the meanness of it, as well as its atrocity, was exhibited to me in colors so inconceivably strong, that I despised myself, with a contempt not to be imagined or expressed, for having attempted it. This sense of it secured me from the repetition of a crime, which I could not now reflect on without abhorrence.

“ Before I arose from bed, it was suggested to me that there was nothing wanted but murder, to fill up the measure of my iniquities ; and that, though I had failed in my design, yet I had all the guilt of that crime to answer for. A sense of God’s wrath, and a deep despair of escaping it, instantly succeeded. The fear of death became much more prevalent in me than ever the desire of it had been.

“ A frequent flashing, like that of fire, before my eyes, and an excessive pressure upon the brain, made me apprehensive of an apoplexy — an event which I thought the more probable, as an extravasation in that part seemed likely enough to happen in so violent a struggle.

“ By the advice of my dear friend and benefactor, who called upon me again at noon, I sent for a physician, and told him the fact, and the stroke I apprehended. He assured me there was no danger of it, and advised me, by all means, to retire into the country. Being made easy in that particular, and not knowing where to betake myself, I continued in my chambers, where the solitude of my situation left me at full liberty to attend to my spiritual state — a matter I had, till this day, never sufficiently thought of.

“ At this time I wrote to my brother, at Cambridge, to inform him of the distress I had been in, and the dreadful method I had taken to deliver myself from it ; assuring him,

as faithfully as I might, that I had laid aside all such horrible intentions, and was desirous to live as long as it pleased the Almighty to spare me.

"My sins were now set in array before me. I began to see and feel that I had lived without God in the world. As I walked to and fro in my chamber, I said within myself, '*There never was so abandoned a wretch ; so great a sinner.*' All my worldly sorrows seemed as though they had never been ; the terrors of my mind which succeeded them seemed so great, and so much more afflicting. One moment I thought myself shut out from mercy, by one chapter ; and the next, by another. The sword of the Spirit seemed to guard the Tree of Life from my touch, and to flame against me in every avenue by which I attempted to approach it. I particularly remember that the parable of the barren fig-tree was to me an inconceivable source of anguish ; I applied it to myself, with a strong persuasion in my mind, that when the Savior pronounced a curse upon it, he had me in his eye ; and pointed that curse directly at me.

"I turned over all Archbishop Tillotson's sermons, in hopes to find one upon the subject, and consulted my brother upon the true meaning of it ; desirous, if possible, to obtain a gentler interpretation of the matter than my evil conscience would suffer me to fasten on it. 'O Lord, thou didst vex me with all thy storms ; all thy billows went over me ; thou didst run upon me like a giant in the night season ; thou didst scare me with visions in the night season.'

"In every book I opened, I found something that struck me to the heart. I remember taking up a volume of Beaumont and Fletcher, which lay upon the table in my kinsman's lodgings, and the first sentence which I saw was this : 'The justice of the gods is in it.' My heart instantly replied, 'It is of a truth : ' and I cannot but observe, that as I found something in every book to condemn me, so it was the first sentence, in general, I pitched upon. Every thing preached to *me*, and every thing preached the curse of the law.

"I was now strongly tempted to use laudanum, not as a poison, but as an opiate, to compose my spirits ; to stupefy

my awakened and feeling mind, harassed with sleepless nights, and days of uninterrupted misery. But God, who would have nothing to interfere with the quickening work he had begun in me, forbade it; and neither the want of rest, nor continued agony of mind, could bring me to the use of it: I hated and abhorred the very smell of it.

"I never went into the street, but I thought the people stared and laughed at me, and held me in contempt; and I could hardly persuade myself, but that the voice of my conscience was loud enough for every one to hear it. They who knew me seemed to avoid me; and if they spoke to me, they seemed to do it in scorn. I bought a ballad of one who was singing it in the street, because I thought it was written on me.

"I dined alone, either at the tavern, where I went in the dark, or at the chop-house, where I always took care to hide myself in the darkest corner of the room. I slept generally an hour in the evening, but it was only to be terrified in dreams; and when I awoke, it was some time before I could walk steadily through the passage into the dining-room. I reeled and staggered like a drunken man. The eyes of man I could not bear; but when I thought that the eyes of God were upon me, (which I felt assured of,) it gave me the most intolerable anguish. If, for a moment, a book or a companion stole away my attention from myself, a flash from hell seemed to be thrown into my mind immediately; and I said within myself, 'What are these things to me, who am damned?' In a word, I saw myself a sinner altogether, and every way a sinner; but I saw not yet a glimpse of the mercy of God in Jesus Christ.

"The capital engine in all the artillery of Satan had not yet been employed against me. Already overwhelmed with despair, I was not yet sunk into the bottom of the gulf. This was a fit season for the use of it; accordingly I was set to inquire, whether I had not been guilty of the unpardonable sin; and was presently persuaded that I had.

"A neglect to improve the mercies of God at Southampton, on the occasion above mentioned, was represented to me as the sin against the Holy Ghost. No favorable con-

struction of my conduct in that instance ; no argument of my brother's, who was now with me ; nothing he could suggest, in extenuation of my offences, could gain a moment's admission. Satan furnished me so readily with weapons against myself, that neither Scripture nor reason could undeceive me. Life appeared to me now more eligible than death, only because it was a barrier between me and everlasting burnings.

"My thoughts in the day became still more gloomy, and my night visions more dreadful. One morning, as I lay between sleeping and waking, I seemed to myself to be walking in Westminster Abbey, waiting till prayers should begin ; presently I thought I heard the minister's voice, and hastened towards the choir ; just as I was upon the point of entering, the iron gate under the organ was flung in my face, with a jar that made the abbey ring ; the noise awoke me ; and a sentence of excommunication from all the churches upon earth could not have been so dreadful to me, as the interpretation which I could not avoid putting upon this dream.

"Another time I seemed to pronounce to myself, 'Evil, be thou my good.' I verily thought that I had adopted that hellish sentiment, it seemed to come so directly from my heart. I arose from bed to look for my prayer-book, and having found it, endeavored to pray ; but immediately experienced the impossibility of drawing nigh to God, unless he first draw nigh to us. I made many passionate attempts towards prayer, but failed in all.

"Having an obscure notion of the efficacy of faith, I resolved upon an experiment, to prove whether I had faith or not. For this purpose I resolved to repeat the Creed ; when I came to the second period of it, all traces of the former were struck out of my memory, nor could I recollect one syllable of the matter. While I endeavored to recover it, and when just upon the point, I perceived a sensation in my brain, like a tremulous vibration in all the fibres of it. By this means I lost the words in the very instant when I thought to have laid hold of them. This threw me into an agony ; but growing a little calmer, I

made an attempt for the third time ; here again I failed in the same manner as before.

"I considered it as a supernatural interposition to inform me, that having sinned against the Holy Ghost, I had no longer any interest in Christ, or in the gifts of the Spirit. Being assured of this, with the most rooted conviction, I gave myself up to despair. I felt a sense of burning in my heart, like that of real fire, and concluded it was an earnest of those eternal flames which would soon receive me. I laid myself down, howling with horror, while my knees smote against each other.

"In this condition my brother found me, and the first words I spoke to him were, 'Oh! brother, I am damned! think of eternity, and then think what it is to be damned!' I had, indeed, a sense of eternity impressed upon my mind, which seemed almost to amount to a full comprehension of it. My brother, pierced to the heart with the sight of my misery, tried to comfort me; but all to no purpose. I refused comfort; and my mind appeared to me in such colors, that to administer it to me, was only to exasperate me, and to mock my fears.

"At length, I remembered my friend, Martin Madan, and sent for him. I used to think him an enthusiast, but now seemed convinced, that if there was any balm in Gilead, he must administer it to me. On former occasions, when my spiritual concerns had at any time occurred to me, I thought likewise on the necessity of repentance. I knew that many persons had spoken of shedding tears for sin; but when I asked myself, whether the time would ever come when I should weep for mine, it seemed to me that a stone might sooner do it.

"Not knowing that Christ was exalted to give repentance, I despaired of ever attaining to it. My friend came to me; we sat on the bed-side together, and he began to declare to me the gospel. He spoke of original sin, and the corruption of every man born into the world, whereby every one is a child of wrath. I perceived something like hope dawning in my heart. This doctrine set me more upon a level with the rest of mankind, and made my condition appear less desperate.

"Next he insisted on the all-atoning efficacy of the blood of Jesus, and his righteousness, for our justification. While listening to this part of his discourse, and the Scriptures upon which he founded it, my heart began to burn within me; my soul was pierced with a sense of my bitter ingratitude to so merciful a Savior; and those tears, which I thought impossible, burst forth freely. I saw clearly that my case required such a remedy, and had not the least doubt within myself, but that this was the gospel of salvation.

"Lastly, he urged the necessity of a lively faith in Jesus Christ; not an assent only of the understanding, but a faith of application, an actually laying hold of it, and embracing it as a salvation purchased for *me* personally. Here I failed, and deplored my want of such a faith. He told me it was the gift of God, which he trusted he would bestow upon me. I could only reply, 'I wish he would'—a very irreverent petition, but a very sincere one, and such as the blessed God, in his due time, was pleased to answer.

"My brother, finding I had received consolation from Mr. Madan, was very anxious that I should take the earliest opportunity of conversing with him again; and, for this purpose, pressed me to go to him immediately. I was for putting it off; but my brother seemed impatient of delay; and, at length, prevailed on me to set out. I mention this to the honor of his candor and humanity; which would suffer no difference of sentiments to interfere with them. My welfare was his only object, and all his prejudices fled before his zeal to procure it. May he receive, for his recompense, all that happiness the gospel, which I then first became acquainted with, is alone able to impart!

"Easier, indeed, I was; but far from easy. The wounded spirit within me was less in pain, but by no means healed. What I had experienced was but the beginning of sorrows, and a long train of still greater terrors was at hand. I slept my usual three hours well, and then awoke with ten times a stronger alienation from God than ever.

"Satan plied me close with horrible visions, and more horrible voices. My ears rang with the sound of torments,

that seemed to await me. Then did the 'pains of hell get hold on me,' and, before daybreak, the very 'sorrows of death encompassed me.' A numbness seized upon the extremities of my body, and life seemed to retreat before it; my hands and feet became cold and stiff; a cold sweat stood upon my forehead; my heart seemed at every pulse to beat its last, and my soul to cling to my lips, as if on the very brink of departure. No convicted criminal ever feared death more, or was more assured of dying.

"At eleven o'clock my brother called upon me, and in about an hour after his arrival, that distemper of mind, which I had so ardently wished for, actually seized me.

"While I traversed the apartment, in the most horrible dismay of soul, expecting every moment that the earth would open her mouth and swallow me; my conscience scaring me, the avenger of blood pursuing me, and the city of refuge out of reach and out of sight; a strange and horrible darkness fell upon me. If it were possible that a heavy blow could light on the brain, without touching the skull, such was the sensation I felt. I clapped my hand to my forehead, and cried aloud, through the pain it gave me. At every stroke my thoughts and expressions became more wild and indistinct; all that remained clear was the sense of sin, and the expectation of punishment. These kept undisturbed possession all through my illness, without interruption or abatement.

"My brother instantly perceived the change, and consulted with my friends on the best manner to dispose of me. It was agreed among them, that I should be carried to St. Alban's, where Dr. Cotton kept a house for the reception of such patients, and with whom I was known to have a slight acquaintance. Not only his skill, as a physician, recommended him to their choice, but his well-known humanity and sweetness of temper. It will be proper to draw a veil over the secrets of my prison-house."

CHAPTER VI.

COWPER'S RECOVERY. HIS REMOVAL TO HUNTINGDON. THE
UNWIN FAMILY.

In the interval between his attempt at suicide and his removal to a private madhouse, Cowper composed the following sapphics, describing his own dreadful state of mind.

Hatred and vengeance, — my eternal portion
Scarce can endure delay of execution, —
Wait with impatient readiness to seize my
Soul in a moment.

Damned below Judas ; more abhorred than he was,
Who for a few pence sold his holy Master !
Twice-betrayed Jesus me, the last delinquent,
Deems the profanest.

Man disavows, and Deity disowns me.
Hell might afford my miseries a shelter ;
Therefore, Hell keeps her ever-hungry mouths all
Bolted against me.

Hard lot ! encompassed with a thousand dangers ;
Weary, faint, trembling with a thousand terrors,
I'm called, if vanquished,¹ to receive a sentence
Worse than Abiram's.

Him the vindictive rod of angry Justice
Sent quick and howling to the centre headlong.
I, fed¹ with judgment, in a fleshly tomb, am
Buried above ground.

This was the character of his madness, — the most dreadful in which madness presents itself. He threw away the Bible, as a book in which he had no longer any interest or portion. A vein of self-loathing and abhorrence ran through all his insanity. "The accuser of the brethren, he

¹ Both these passages are evidently corrupt. Possibly the first should be *in anguish*.

says, ever busy with him, night and day, brought to his recollection in dreams his long-forgotten sins, and charged upon his conscience things of an indifferent nature as atrocious crimes." Five months he passed in continual expectation that the divine vengeance would instantly plunge him into the bottomless pit. But such horrors in madness are like those in dreams; the maniac and the dreamer seem to undergo what could not possibly be undergone by one awake or in his senses; and, indeed, he says, that after five months of this expectation, he became so familiar with despair as to entertain a sort of hardiness and indifference as to the event.

"I began to persuade myself, that while the execution of the sentence was suspended, it would be for my interest to indulge a less horrible train of ideas, than I had been accustomed to dwell upon. 'Eat and drink, for to-morrow thou shalt be in hell,' was the maxim on which I proceeded. By this means, I entered into conversation with the doctor, laughed at his stories, and told him some of my own to match them; still, however, carrying a sentence of irrevocable doom in my heart.

"He observed the seeming alteration with pleasure. Believing, as well he might, that my smiles were sincere, he thought my recovery well nigh completed; but they were, in reality, like the green surface of a morass, pleasant to the eye, but a cover for nothing but rottenness and filth. The only thing that could promote and effectuate my cure, was yet wanting—an experimental knowledge of the truth as it is in Christ Jesus.

"I remember, about this time, a diabolical species of regret that found harbor in my wretched heart. I was sincerely sorry that I had not seized every opportunity of giving scope to my wicked appetites; and even envied those, who, being departed to their own place before me, had the consolation to reflect that they had well earned their miserable inheritance, by indulging their sensuality without restraint. Oh, merciful God! What a Tophet of pollution is the human soul! and wherein do we differ from the devils, unless thy grace prevent us!"

In about three months more, his brother, who was a

fellow of Benet College, and resided there, came from Cambridge to visit him. Dr. Cotton had reported a great amendment, and was not mistaken in that opinion, though John Cowper was disappointed at finding him almost as silent and reserved as ever. His own sensations at the meeting he describes as painfully mingled with sorrow for his own remediless condition, and envy of his brother's happiness.

"As soon as we were left alone, he asked me how I found myself; I answered, 'As much better as despair can make me.' We went together into the garden. Here, on expressing a settled assurance of sudden judgment, he protested to me, that it was all a delusion; and protested so strongly, that I could not help giving some attention to him. I burst into tears, and cried out, 'If it be a delusion, then am I the happiest of beings.' Something like a ray of hope was shot into my heart; but still I was afraid to indulge it. We dined together, and I spent the afternoon in a more cheerful manner. Something seemed to whisper to me every moment, 'Still there is mercy.'

"Even after he left me, this change of sentiment gathered ground continually; yet my mind was in such a fluctuating state, that I can only call it a vague presage of better things at hand, without being able to assign a reason for it. The servant observed a sudden alteration in me for the better; and the man, whom I have ever since retained in my service, expressed great joy on the occasion.

"I went to bed and slept well. In the morning I dreamed that the sweetest boy I ever saw came dancing up to my bed-side; he seemed just out of leading-strings, yet I took particular notice of the firmness and steadiness of his tread. The sight affected me with pleasure, and served at least to harmonize my spirits; so that I awoke for the first time with a sensation of delight on my mind. Still, however, I knew not where to look for the establishment of the comfort I felt. My joy was as much a mystery to myself as to those about me. The blessed God was preparing me for the clearer light of his countenance by this first dawning of his light upon me."

That he could feel the force of argument, and that he

could weep, were sure symptoms of amendment. Indeed, he dated his recovery from his brother's visit ; saying, in a letter² written before the Memoir, " though he only staid one day with me, his company served to put to flight a thousand deliriums and delusions which I still labored under, and the next morning I found myself a new creature." It was not long before, walking in the garden, he found, upon a seat there, a Bible, which very probably had been laid in his way. He opened it upon the chapter in which Lazarus is raised from the dead, and he saw " so much benevolence, and mercy, and goodness, and sympathy with miserable man, in our Savior's conduct," that he was moved almost to tears ; " little thinking," he says, " that it was an exact type of the mercy which Jesus was on the point of extending towards myself. I sighed, and said, ' Oh that I had not rejected so good a Redeemer, — that I had not forfeited all his favors ! ' Thus was my heart softened, though not yet enlightened. I closed the book, without intending to open it again.

" Having risen with somewhat of a more cheerful feeling, I repaired to my room, where breakfast waited for me. While I sat at table, I found the cloud of horror, which had so long hung over me, was every moment passing away ; and every moment came fraught with hope. I was continually more and more persuaded, that I was not utterly doomed to destruction. The way of salvation was still, however, hid from my eyes ; nor did I see it at all clearer than before my illness. I only thought, that if it would please God to spare me, I would lead a better life ; and that I would yet escape hell, if a religious observance of my duty would secure me from it. Thus may the terror of the Lord make a Pharisee ; but only the sweet voice of mercy in the gospel, can make a Christian.

" But the happy period which was to shake off my fetters, and afford me a clear opening of the free mercy of God in Christ Jesus, was now arrived. I flung myself into a chair near the window, and seeing a Bible there, ventured once more to apply to it for comfort and instruction. The

² To Lady Hesketh, July 5, 1765.

first verse I saw was the twenty-fifth of the third chapter of Romans : ' Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.'

"Immediately I received strength to believe, and the full beams of the Sun of Righteousness shone upon me. I saw the sufficiency of the atonement He had made, my pardon sealed in His blood, and all the fulness and completeness of his justification. In a moment I believed, and received the gospel. Whatever my friend Madan had said to me, so long before, revived in all its clearness, with 'demonstration of the Spirit and with power.' Unless the Almighty arm had been under me, I think I should have died with gratitude and joy. My eyes filled with tears, and my voice choked with transport, I could only look up to heaven in silent fear, overwhelmed with love and wonder. But the work of the Holy Spirit is best described in his own words ; it was 'joy unspeakable, and full of glory.' Thus was my heavenly Father in Christ Jesus pleased to give me the full assurance of faith, and out of a stony, unbelieving heart, to raise up a child unto Abraham. How glad should I now have been to have spent every moment in prayer and thanksgiving !

"I lost no opportunity of repairing to a throne of grace ; but flew to it with an earnestness irresistible and never to be satisfied. Could I help it ? Could I do otherwise than love and rejoice in my reconciled Father in Christ Jesus ? The Lord had enlarged my heart, and I ran in the way of his commandments. For many succeeding weeks, tears were ready to flow, if I did but speak of the gospel, or mention the name of Jesus. To rejoice day and night was all my employment. Too happy to sleep much, I thought it was lost time that was spent in slumber. Oh that the ardor of my first love had continued ! But I have known many a lifeless and unhallowed hour since ; long intervals of darkness, interrupted by short returns of peace and joy in believing.

"My physician, ever watchful and apprehensive for my welfare, was now alarmed, lest the sudden transition

from despair to joy should terminate in a fatal frenzy. But 'the Lord was my strength and my song, and was become my salvation.' I said, 'I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord; he has chastened me sore, but not given me over unto death. O give thanks unto the Lord, for his mercy endureth forever!' In a short time, Dr. C. became satisfied, and acquiesced in the soundness of my cure; and much sweet communion I had with him, concerning the things of our salvation."

Cowper thought that the low state of body and mind to which his disease and the remedies employed in subduing it had reduced him, were well calculated to humble his natural vain glory and pride of heart. "Blessed," says he, "be the God of salvation for every sigh I drew, for every tear I shed; since thus it pleased him to judge me here, that I might not be judged hereafter." He was in no haste to remove after his recovery; but remained twelve months longer with Dr. Cotton. This was equally a matter of prudence and of convenience, till he had determined what course to pursue upon leaving his present abode; meantime, in case of any tendency to relapse, the best medical and moral means might immediately be applied; and he took great delight in Dr. Cotton's religious conversation. He thought him a true philosopher, "every tittle of his knowledge on natural subjects being connected in his mind with the firm belief of an Omnipotent Agent."

Dr. Cotton was moreover a man of letters. His "Visions in Verse" used to be one of those books which were always in print, because there was a certain demand for them as presents for young people. His various pieces in prose and verse were collected and published in two volumes after his death; and from this edition his poems³ were incorporated in Dr. Anderson's "Collection of the British Poets." The well-known stanzas entitled "The Fireside" still hold and are likely to retain a place in popular selections. He was an amiable, mild, good man, verging at that time to old age, who many years before had

³ "Death and the Rake," which Dr. Cotton gives as "A Dutch Tale," is the same story which has been better told by Mrs. Piozzi as "The Three Warnings."

lost a dearly-beloved wife, and on that occasion felt what, happily for himself, he had long believed, "that no system but that of Christianity is able to sustain the soul amidst all the distresses and difficulties of life. The consolations of philosophy only are specious trifles at best; all cold and impotent applications to the bleeding heart. But the religion of Jesus, like its gracious Author, is an inexhaustible source of comfort in this world, and gives us the hope of everlasting enjoyment in the next." Thus he expressed⁴ himself in reply to a letter of consolation from Doddridge upon his loss.

"I reckon it," says Cowper, "one instance of the providence which has attended me throughout this whole event, that instead of being delivered into the hands of one of the London physicians, who were so much nearer that I wonder I was not, I was carried to Doctor Cotton. I was not only treated by him with the greatest tenderness while I was ill, and attended with the utmost diligence, but when my reason was restored to me, and I had so much need of a religious friend to converse with, to whom I could open my mind on the subject without reserve, I could hardly have found a fitter person for the purpose. My eagerness and anxiety to settle my opinions upon that long-neglected point, made it necessary that, while my mind was yet weak and my spirits uncertain, I should have some assistance. The doctor was as ready to administer relief to me in this article likewise, and as well qualified to do it, as in that which was more immediately his province. How many physicians would have thought this an irregular appetite, and a symptom of remaining madness! But if it were so, my friend was as mad as myself; and it was well for me that he was so."⁵

⁴ April 29, 1749. In this letter, he says, "What the mind feels upon such a painful divorce none can adequately know but they who have had the bitter experience of the sad solemnity. However, delicate and worthy minds will readily paint to themselves something unutterably soft and moving upon the separation of two hearts, whose only division was their lodgment in two breasts." *Doddridge's Correspondence and Diary*, vol. v. p. 117. He is called *Henry Cotton* in this work, but his name was *Nathaniel*.

⁵ To Lady Hesketh, July 4, 1765.

During this part of his abode at St. Alban's, he again poured out his feelings in verse ; and the contrast is indeed striking between what he called this specimen of his first Christian thoughts, and that song of despair which cannot be perused without shuddering. He cast his thoughts in the form of a hymn, which he entitled "The Happy Change," and took for his text part of a verse in the Revelation — "Behold I make all things new."

How blest thy creature is, O God,
When with a single eye
He views the lustre of thy word,
The day-spring from on high !

Through all the storms that veil the skies,
And frown on earthly things,
The Sun of Righteousness he eyes,
With healing on his wings.

Struck by that light, the human heart,
A barren soil no more,
Sends the sweet smell of grace abroad,
Where serpents lurked before.

The soul, a dreary province once
Of Satan's dark domain,
Feels a new empire formed within,
And owns a heavenly reign.

The glorious orb, whose golden beams
The fruitful year control,
Since first, obedient to thy word,
He started from the goal,

Has cheered the nations with the joys
His orient rays impart ;
But, Jesus, 'tis thy light alone
Can shine upon the heart.

He had now to fix upon a place of residence. To remain longer with Dr. Cotton, to whom he was by this time "very deep in debt," was what he could not afford. He employed his brother, therefore, to look for lodgings in the neighborhood of Cambridge, "being," said he, "determined, by the Lord's leave, to see London, the scene of my former abominations, no longer." And that he might have no obli-

gation to return thither, he resigned the office of commissioner of bankrupts, which he had for some years held, with about sixty pounds per annum. He now felt so strongly his ignorance of the law, that he could not in conscience take the accustomed oath; and by this resignation he reduced himself to an income scarcely sufficient for his maintenance; "but I would rather," says he, "have starved in reality, than deliberately have offended against my Savior." His relations made no attempt to dissuade him from this resolution. Instead of being to them an object of high hopes and expectations, as from his talents and acquirements and disposition he had been when he began life, he had become one of painful and all but hopeless anxiety. Probably they doubted whether his cure was complete, and inferred, from his intended conduct, that though the malady had assumed a happier form, his mind was still unsound. They therefore subscribed⁶ among themselves an annual allowance, such as made his own diminished means just sufficient to maintain him respectably, but frugally, in retirement, and left him to follow his own course.

His resolution to withdraw from the business of the world, and from its society, occasioned another of those poems which, because of the circumstances that gave rise to them, belong properly to the personal history of an author.

Far from the world, O Lord, I flee,
From strife and tumult far;
From scenes where Satan wages still
His most successful war.

The calm retreat, the silent shade,
With prayer and praise agree;
And seem, by thy sweet bounty, made
For those who follow thee.

⁶ This fact, which has not, I believe, been noticed in any life of Cowper, might be inferred from his own memoir, where, after saying he would rather have starved than deliberately have offended against his Savior, he adds, "His great mercy has raised me up such friends as have enabled me to enjoy all the comforts and conveniences of life. I am well assured that, while I live, 'bread shall be given me, and water shall be sure.' " But proof of the fact will presently be given.

There, if thy Spirit touch the soul,
 And grace her mean abode,
 Oh, with what peace, and joy, and love,
 She communes with her God!

There, like the nightingale, she pours
 Her solitary lays;
 Nor asks a witness of her song,
 Nor thirsts for human praise.

Author and guardian of my life,
 Sweet source of light divine,
 And (all harmonious names in one)
 My Savior, thou art mine!

What thanks I owe thee, and what love,
 A boundless, endless store,
 Shall echo through the realms above
 When time shall be no more.

After many unsuccessful attempts to procure lodgings nearer Cambridge, John Cowper wrote to say he had found some at Huntingdon which he believed might suit him. Though this was an inconvenient distance from Cambridge, and Cowper had fixed upon that part of the country solely for the sake of being near his brother, he did not hesitate to take them, having then, he said, been twelve months in perfect health, and his circumstances requiring a less expensive way of life. Before this arrangement was made, he says, "I one day poured out my soul to God in prayer, beseeching him that wherever it should please him in his fatherly mercy to lead me, it might be into the society of those who feared his name, and loved the Lord Jesus in sincerity and truth." It was with great reluctance that he thought of leaving what he called the place of his second nativity, where he had "so much leisure to study the blessed word of God, and had enjoyed so much happiness.

"On the 7th of June, 1765," he proceeds, "having spent more than eighteen months at St. Alban's, partly in bondage, and partly in the liberty wherewith Christ had made me free, I took my leave of the place at four in the morning, and set out for Cambridge. The servant, whom I lately mentioned as rejoicing in my recovery, attended me. He had maintained such an affectionate watchfulness

over me during my whole illness, and waited on me with so much patience and gentleness, that I could not bear to leave him behind, though it was with some difficulty the doctor was prevailed on to part with him. The strongest argument of all was the earnest desire he expressed to follow me. He seemed to have been providentially thrown in my way, having entered Dr. Cotton's service just time enough to attend me ; and I have strong ground to hope, that God will use me as an instrument to bring him to a knowledge of Jesus. It is impossible to say, with how delightful a sense of his protection, and fatherly care of me, it has pleased the Almighty to favor me during the whole journey.

"I remembered the pollution which is in the world, and the sad share I had in it myself ; and my heart ached at the thought of entering it again. The blessed God had endued me with some concern for his glory, and I was fearful of hearing it traduced by oaths and blasphemies, the common language of this highly-favored, but ungrateful country. But 'fear not, I am with thee,' was my comfort. I passed the whole journey in silent communion with God ; and those hours are amongst the happiest I have known."

Four days he remained at Cambridge, and then, on Saturday the twenty-second, his brother accompanied him to Huntingdon, and having introduced him to his lodgings, left him there, without any other introduction. "No sooner," says Cowper, "had he left me than finding myself surrounded by strangers, and in a strange place, my spirits began to sink, and I felt (such was the backsliding state of my heart) like a traveller in the midst of an inhospitable desert, without a friend to comfort, or a guide to direct him. I walked forth, towards the close of the day, in this melancholy frame of mind, and having wandered about a mile from the town, I found my heart, at length, so powerfully drawn towards the Lord, that having gained a retired and secret nook in the corner of a field, I kneeled down under a bank, and poured forth my complaints before him. It pleased my Savior to hear me, so that this oppression was taken off, and I was enabled to trust in him that careth for the stranger, to roll my burden upon him, and to rest

assured, that wheresoever he might cast my lot, the God of all consolation would still be with me. But this was not all. He did for me more than either I had asked or thought.

"The next day I went to church for the first time after my recovery. Throughout the whole service, I had much to do to restrain my emotions, so fully did I see the beauty and the glory of the Lord. My heart was full of love to all the congregation, especially to those in whom I observed an air of sober attention. A grave and sober person sat in the pew with me ; him I have since seen and often conversed with, and have found him a pious man, and a true servant of the blessed Redeemer. While he was singing the psalm, I looked at him, and observing him intent on his holy employment, I could not help saying in my heart, with much emotion, ' Bless you, for praising Him whom my soul loveth ! '

"Such was the goodness of the Lord to me, that he gave me ' the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness ; ' and though my voice was silent, being stopped by the intenseness of what I felt, yet my soul sung within me, and even leaped for joy. And when the gospel for the day was read, the sound of it was more than I could well support. Oh, what a word is the word of God, when the Spirit quickens us to receive it, and gives the hearing ear, and the understanding heart ! The harmony of heaven is in it, and discovers its author. The parable of the prodigal son was the portion. I saw myself in that glass so clearly, and the loving kindness of my slighted and forgotten Lord, that the whole scene was realized to me, and acted over in my heart.

"I went immediately after church to the place where I had prayed the day before, and found the relief I had there received was but the earnest of a richer blessing. How shall I express what the Lord did for me, except by saying, that he made all his goodness to pass before me ? I seemed to speak to him face to face, as a man conversing with his friend, except that my speech was only in tears of joy, and groanings which cannot be uttered. I could say, indeed, with Jacob, not ' how dreadful, ' but how lovely, ' is this place ! ' This is none other than the house of God. ' "

His mind had now recovered its elasticity, and when not engaged in devotional feelings, its natural sportiveness. On the Monday he resumed with his friend Hill an intercourse which from their boyhood till his death was never interrupted, while he was capable of correspondence. Mr. Hill had attended with friendly care to his affairs during his illness, and "the only recompense I can make," says Cowper, "is to tell you that by the mercy of God I am restored to perfect health, both of mind and body. This I believe will give you pleasure, and I would gladly do any thing from which you could receive it.

"I have a lodging that puts me continually in mind of our summer excursions; we have had many worse, and except the size of it, (which, however, is sufficient for a single man,) but few better. I am not quite alone, having brought a servant with me from St. Alban's, who is the very mirror of fidelity and affection for his master. And whereas the Turkish Spy says, he kept no servant, because he would not have an enemy in his house, I hired mine, because I would have a friend. Men do not usually bestow these encomiums on their lackeys, nor do they usually deserve them; but I have had experience of mine, both in sickness and in health, and never saw his fellow.

"The river Ouse, I forget how they spell it, is the most agreeable circumstance in this part of the world; at this town, it is, I believe, as wide as the Thames at Windsor; nor does the silver Thames better deserve that epithet, nor has it more flowers upon its banks, these being attributes, which, in strict truth, belong to neither. Fluellin would say, they are as like as my fingers to my fingers, and there is salmon in both. It is a noble stream to bathe in, and I shall make that use of it three times a week, having introduced myself to it for the first time this morning."

Lady Hesketh was the last of his female relations whom he had seen before he was removed from London to St. Alban's. She was the first to whom he wrote after his recovery. "Since the visit you were so kind to pay me in the Temple," said he,⁷ "the only time I ever saw you

⁷ July 6, 1765.

without pleasure,) what have I not suffered ! And since it has pleased God to restore me to the use of my reason, what have I not enjoyed ! You know by experience how pleasant it is to feel the first approaches of health after a fever ; but oh, the fever of the brain ! To feel the quenching of that fire is indeed a blessing which I think it impossible to receive without the most consummate gratitude. Terrible as this chastisement is, I acknowledge in it the hand of an infinite justice ; nor is it at all more difficult for me to perceive in it the hand of an infinite mercy likewise. When I consider the effect it has had upon me, I am exceedingly thankful for it, and, without hypocrisy, esteem it the greatest blessing, next to life itself, I have received from the divine bounty. I pray God that I may ever retain this sense of it ; and then I am sure I shall continue to be, as I am at present, really happy.

“ I write thus to you, that you may not think me a forlorn and wretched creature ; which you might be apt to do, considering my very distant removal from every friend I have in the world ; a circumstance which, before this event befell me, would undoubtedly have made me so ; but my affliction has taught me a road to happiness, which without it I should never have found. You may now inform all those whom you think really interested in my welfare, that they have no need to be apprehensive on the score of my happiness at present. And you yourself will believe that my happiness is no dream, because I have told you the foundation on which it is built.”

To this letter Cowper received an immediate reply,—“ a friendly and comfortable ” reply, he calls it, for which as immediately he thanked his dear cousin. Again he alluded to their last interview. “ What,” said he, “ could you think of my unaccountable behavior to you on that visit ? I remember I neither spoke to you, nor looked at you. The solution of the mystery, indeed, followed soon after ; but at the time it must have been inexplicable. The uproar within was even then begun, and my silence was only the sulkiness of a thunder-storm before it opens. I am glad, however, that the only instance in which I knew not how to value your company, was when I was not in my senses.

It was the first of the kind, and I trust in God it will be the last." ⁸ Twenty years later, when, after a long cessation, his intercourse with this beloved kinswoman was renewed, Cowper again reminded her of that painful interview, which had left upon his mind an indelible impression: "You do not forget, I dare say, that you and Sir Thomas called upon me in my chambers, a very few days before I took leave of London. Then it was that I saw you last; and then it was that I said in my heart, upon your going out at the door, Farewell! there will be no more intercourse between us — forever!" ⁹

He had not written to her from St. Alban's when assured of his recovery, because he was willing to perform quarantine first, both for his own sake, and because he thought his letters would be more satisfactory to her from any other quarter. All was sunshine with him now. He liked the place extremely, as far as he was acquainted with it. For one who had so long lived in chambers it was no discomfort to be alone in lodgings. It was in the height of summer, he was fond of bathing, and there was the Ouse at hand. "Here is a card assembly," he writes to Mr. Hill, ¹⁰ "and a dancing assembly, and a horse-race, and a club, and a bowling-green, so that I am well off, you perceive, in point of diversions; especially as I shall go to 'em just as much as I should if I lived a thousand miles off. But no matter for that; the spectator at a play is more entertained than the actor, and in real life it is much the same. You will say, perhaps, that if I never frequent these places I shall not come within the description of a spectator; and you will say right. I have made a blunder, which shall be corrected in the next edition."

The first visit he received was from his woollen-draper, "a very healthy, wealthy, sensible, sponsonable man, and extremely civil," who offered him the use of a cold bath, and promised to get him the St. James's Chronicle, and to do him every service in his power. Soon afterwards Mr. Hodgson, the clergyman of the parish, called upon him, "a good preacher, a conscientious minister, and a very sen-

⁸ July 4.⁹ Nov. 23, 1785.¹⁰ July 3.

sible man." Cowper neither sought society, nor shunned it at this time; he was in that happy state of mind which can enjoy fit company, and yet feel no want of it in solitude. In his daily walk, his weekly meeting with his brother, and his correspondence with Hill, the most intimate and faithful of his friends, and with Lady Hesketh, who, after his attachment to her sister had been violently broken, had become to him the dearest of his relations, he found sufficient occupation and amusement.

"As Mr. Quin," he said, "very roundly expressed himself upon some such occasion, 'here is very plentiful accommodation, and great happiness of provision; so that if I starve, it must be through forgetfulness, rather than scarcity.'"¹¹ But never having been accustomed to take thought for himself about these things, he felt the discomfort of his way of life, before he discovered its improvidence. "Whatever you may think of the matter," said he to his friend Hill, "it is no such easy thing to keep house for two people. A man cannot always live like the lions in the Tower; and a joint of meat in so small a family is an endless incumbrance. In short I never knew how to pity poor housekeepers before; but now I cease to wonder at that politic cast which their occupation usually gives to their countenance, for it is really a matter full of perplexity."¹²

The state of his finances at this time, though it was far from easy, seems to have caused him little anxiety. "You know, Joe," he says, "I am very deep in debt to my little physician at St. Alban's, and that the handsomest thing I can do will be to pay him *le plutôt qu'il sera possible*, (this is vile French, I believe, but you can, now, correct it.) My brother informs me that you have such a quantity of cash in your hands, on my account, that I may venture to send him forty pounds immediately. This, therefore, I shall be obliged if you will manage for me; and when you receive the hundred pounds, which my brother likewise brags you are shortly to receive, I shall be glad if you will discharge the remainder of that debt, without waiting for any further advice from your humble servant."¹³

¹¹ To Lady Hesketh, July 5.

¹² To Mr. Hill, July 3.

¹³ To Mr. Hill, Aug. 14.

The rent of his chambers in the Temple constituted part of the resources upon which he reckoned ; but the person who had entered upon them was one who found it convenient to postpone payment till it should be forced from him, and Cowper was compelled to call in the professional assistance of his friend Hill.¹⁴ "You are an old dog," he says, "at a bad tenant ; witness all my uncle's and your mother's geese and gridirons. There is something so extremely impertinent in entering upon a man's premises, and using them without paying for 'em, that I could easily resent it if I would. But I rather choose to entertain myself with thinking how you will scour the man about, and worry him to death, if once you begin with him. Poor toad ! I leave him entirely to your mercy !" The toad, however, was not under the harrow four months afterwards, when Cowper says of him, "I think the Welshman must *morris* ; — what think you ? If he withdraws to his native mountains, we shall never catch him ; so the best way is to let him run in debt no longer."¹⁵ After another month's interval, he says, "I rejoice with you in the victory you have obtained over the Welshman's pocket. The reluctance with which he pays and promises to pay, gives me but little concern, further than as it seems to threaten you with the trouble of many fruitless applications hereafter, in the receipts of my lordship's rents."¹⁶

"The storm of sixty-three," Cowper said, "made a wreck of the friendships he had contracted in the course of many years,¹⁷ Hill's excepted, which had survived the tempest. In an earlier letter, he says, "I have great reason to be thankful ; I have lost none of my acquaintances, but those whom I determined not to keep. I am sorry the class is so numerous."¹⁸ In another a somewhat different cause is assigned ; "My friends must excuse me, if I write to none but those who lay it fairly in my way to do so. The inference I am apt to draw from their silence is, that they wish *me* to be silent too." His own peculiar circle had been broken up soon after he was withdrawn from it. The first account which he heard of it was of a kind to

¹⁴ July 3. ¹⁵ Nov. 8. ¹⁶ Dec. 3. ¹⁷ Sept. 25, 1770. ¹⁸ Aug. 1, 1763.

startle him. "The tragedies of Lloyd and Bensley," said he to Hill, "are both very deep. If they are not of use to the surviving part of the society, it will be their own fault."¹⁹ To Lady Hesketh he unbosomed his feelings upon this subject. "Two of my friends have been cut off during my illness, in the midst of such a life as it is frightful to reflect upon; and here am I, in better health and spirits than I can almost remember to have enjoyed before, after having spent months in the apprehension of instant death. How mysterious are the ways of Providence! Why did I receive grace and mercy? Why was I preserved, afflicted for my good, received, as I trust, into favor, and blessed with the greatest happiness I can ever know, or hope for, in this life, while these were overtaken by the great arrest, unawakened, unrepenting, and every way unprepared for it? His infinite wisdom, to whose infinite mercy I owe it all, can solve these questions, and none beside him."

Thornton's name, I believe, never occurs in his letters. "My friend Colman," he says, "has had good fortune. I wish him better fortune still, which is, that he may make a right use of it."²⁰ Towards Colman, indeed, he had always a friendly feeling, and for Thurlow also; and when for a while he thought and spoke of them both with bitterness, it was more from a sense of disappointed friendship than of wounded pride. Cowper's was, indeed, a heart in which latent affections held their place, and were easily called into action. Eight-and-twenty years after the great crisis of his life, he says, "I often think of Carr, and shall always think of him with affection. Should I never see him more, I shall never, I trust, be capable of forgetting his indefatigable attention to me during the last year that I spent in London. Two years after, I invited him to Huntingdon, where I lived at that time, but he pleaded some engagement, and I have neither seen nor heard of him, except from yourself, from that hour to the present. I know, by experience, with what reluctance we move when we have been long fixed; but could he prevail on himself to move hither, he would make me very happy, and when you write to him next, you may tell him so."²¹

¹⁹ July 3, 1763. ²⁰ July 3, 1765. ²¹ To Mr. Rowley, Oct. 22, 1791.

He was in hopes also of receiving a visit at Huntingdon from Hill, to whom he says, "Both Lady Hesketh and my brother had apprized me of your intention to give me a call; and herein I find they were both mistaken. But they both informed me, likewise, that you were already set out for Warwickshire; in consequence of which latter intelligence, I have lived in continual expectation of seeing you, any time this fortnight. Now, how these two ingenious personages (for such they are both) should mistake an expedition to French Flanders for a journey to Warwickshire, is more than I, with all my ingenuity, can imagine. I am glad, however, that I have still a chance of seeing you, and shall treasure it up amongst my agreeable expectations. In the mean time, you are welcome to the British shore, as the song has it, and I thank you for your epitome of your travels. You don't tell me how you escaped the vigilance of the custom-house officers, though I dare say you were knuckle-deep in contrabands, and had your boots stuffed with all and all manner of unlawful wares and merchandises." This visit, however, soon took place, and Hill was the only one of his old friends whom Cowper saw for many years after his retirement.

For some three months Huntingdon continued to please him more and more. "The longer I live here," said he, "the better I like the place, and the people who belong to it." It must have been for the sake of the people that he liked the place; though in that respect indeed Cowper was easily satisfied; his feeling of local attachment could strike root in any soil. The old historian and archdeacon of this town, Henry, who derived his name from it, praised Huntingdon for the conveniency of the fens just by, and its great advantages for hunting and fishing; "it surpassed," he said, "all the neighboring towns in the pleasantness of its situation, and in its handsomeness and beauty." But since his time, thirteen out of fifteen churches had been demolished, or had fallen to ruins; a priory of regular canons, a house of Augustinian friars, and two hospitals for lepers and poor people, had been destroyed; and of its large castle, placed on a commanding site above the Ouse, and supposed to have been originally a Roman work, no vestiges remained

above ground. "From the Castle hill," says Camden, "there is a wide prospect, where one may see an extensive meadow, encompassed with the Ouse, called Portsholm, the sun never saw a more glorious one." The race-ground was in this meadow. The vicinity of the fens was once thought an advantage; the plenty of pasture, the great profit of fishing, and the inexhaustible supply of turf for fuel being supposed to make amends for an atmosphere which was frequently laden with noisome fogs, and was never, at the best, salubrious.

The fish and the fowl of the fens were unmolested by Cowper. He was no angler, though, for a Protestant, one of the most ichthyophagous of men; and he was no sportsman; his gentle heart, at no time of his life, needed Wordsworth's admonition,

Never to blend our pleasure or our pride
With sorrow of the meanest thing that feels.

The country had little to tempt him abroad. "We have neither woods," he says, "nor commons, nor pleasant prospects; all flat and insipid; in the summer adorned only with blue willows, and in the winter covered with a flood."²² Camden says that the Ouse decks the country with flowers; but Cowper, though fond of gardening, and though he used every year to purchase myrtles in Covent Garden for his chambers in the Temple, was no botanist. The Ouse was to him, as has been seen, the most agreeable circumstance in those parts; and the only spot in the neighborhood which he describes as beautiful was a village called Hertford, about a mile and half from the town. "The church there," says he, "is very prettily situated upon a rising ground, so close to the river, that it washes the wall of the churchyard. I found an epitaph there the other morning, the two first lines of which, being better than any thing else I saw there, I made shift to remember. It is by a widow on her husband.

'Thou wast too good to live on earth with me,
And I not good enough to die with thee.'²³

²² To Lady Hesketh, Jan. 30, 1767.

²³ To Lady Hesketh, July 5, 1765.

The town, however, suited him. In his days it consisted of one street, nearly a mile in length, with several lanes branching off at right angles ; it contained something more than three hundred houses, and less than two thousand inhabitants. It was one of the neatest towns in England, he said ; and as it is a considerable thoroughfare, and small vessels come up the river from Lynn, there was stir enough to make it lively. Brewing was then the chief business, though not so extensively carried on as in the time of Cromwell's mother, who, from the profits of her brewery there, brought up her family in a manner not unbeseeming their gentle birth, and portioned her daughters well. Long after her house had been so greatly altered, within and without, that it was said to be new built, the chamber in which Oliver was born was preserved in its original state. The site has since been occupied by "a respectable brick mansion," called Cromwell House Academy, and now only the situation of that chamber is pointed out.

"You may recollect," says Cowper,²⁴ to his benefactor and kinsman, the major, "that I had but very uncomforable expectations of the accommodations I should meet with at Huntingdon. How much better is it to take our lot where it shall please Providence to cast it, without anxiety ! Had I chosen for myself, it is impossible I could have fixed upon a place so agreeable to me in all respects. I so much dreaded the thought of having a new acquaintance to make, with no other recommendation than that of being a perfect stranger, that I heartily wished no creature here might take the least notice of me. Instead of which, in about two months after my arrival, I became known to all the visitable people here, and do verily think it the most agreeable neighborhood I ever saw.

"Here are three families, who have received me with the utmost civility ; and two, in particular, have treated me with as much cordiality as if their pedigree and mine had grown upon the same sheep-skin. Besides these, there are three or four single men, who suit my temper to a hair."

These were probably the "odd scrambling fellows like

²⁴ Oct. 18, 1765.

himself," whom he thus describes to Lady Hesketh.²⁵ "Another acquaintance, I have lately made, is with a Mr. Nicholson, a North-country divine, very poor, but very good and very happy. He reads prayers here twice a day, all the year round; and travels on foot, to serve two churches every Sunday through the year; his journey out and home again being sixteen miles. I supped with him last night. He gave me bread and cheese, and a black jug of ale of his own brewing, and doubtless brewed by his own hands. Another of my acquaintance is Mr. —, a thin, tall, old man, and as good as he is thin. He drinks nothing but water, and eats no flesh; partly (I believe) from a religious scruple, (for he is very religious,) and partly in the spirit of a valetudinarian. He is to be met with every morning of his life at about six o'clock, at a fountain of very fine water, about a mile from the town, which is reckoned extremely like the Bristol spring. Being both early risers, and the only early walkers in the place, we soon became acquainted. His great piety can be equalled by nothing but his great regularity, for he is the most perfect time-piece in the world. I have received a visit likewise from Mr. —. He is very much a gentleman, well read, and sensible. I am persuaded, in short, that if I had the choice of all England, where to fix my abode, I could not have chosen better for myself, and most likely I should not have chosen so well."

"As to my own personal condition," he says, "I am much happier than the day is long, and sunshine and candle-light alike see me perfectly contented. I get books in abundance, a deal of *comfortable leisure*, and enjoy better health, I think, than for many years past. What is there wanting to make me happy? Nothing, if I can but be as thankful as I ought; and I trust that He who has bestowed so many blessings upon me, will give me gratitude to crown them all."²⁶

Cowper had not at this time so fixed himself in retirement as to give up all thought of visiting his friends. He says to Lady Hesketh,²⁷ "You cannot think how glad I

²⁵ Sept. 14, 1765.

²⁶ To Major Cowper, Oct. 18, 1761.

²⁷ Sept. 4, 1769.

am to hear you are going to commence lady and mistress of Freemantle. I know it well, and could go to it from Southampton blindfold. You are kind to invite me to it, and I shall be so kind to myself as to accept the invitation; though I should not for a slight consideration be prevailed upon to quit my beloved retirement at Huntingdon." Some change in Lady Hesketh's plans frustrated this intention, which might otherwise have been frustrated by a change in his own. By the time he had spent three months in his lodgings, he had "contrived, by the help of good management and a clear notion of economical affairs, to spend the income of a twelvemonth." One day he found himself "in a state of desertion." In his own words, "the communion I had been so long enabled to maintain with the Lord, was suddenly interrupted. I began to dislike my solitary situation, and to fear I should never be able to weather out the winter in so lonely a dwelling."²⁸ The excitement consequent upon such a recovery as his, was beginning to fail in solitude; and he felt the want of intellectual occupation and of domestic society, both which were essential for his happiness.

Fortunately he had then made acquaintance "with the race of the Unwins, consisting," as he says to Lady Hesketh,²⁹ "of father and mother, and son and daughter, the most comfortable, social folks you ever knew. The son is about twenty-one years of age; one of the most unreserved and amiable young men I ever conversed with. He is not yet arrived at that time of life when suspicion recommends itself to us in the form of wisdom, and sets every thing but our own dear selves at an immeasurable distance from our esteem and confidence. Consequently he is known almost as soon as seen; and having nothing in his heart that makes it necessary for him to keep it barred and bolted, opens it to the general view of a stranger. The father is a clergyman, and the son is designed for orders. The design, however, is quite his own, proceeding merely from his being, and having always been, sincere in his belief and love of the gospel."

²⁸ To Lady Hesketh, Nov. 9, 1785.

²⁹ Sept. 14, 1763.

The son, William Cawthorne Unwin, had been pleased with Cowper's countenance, whose appearance and deportment indeed were likely to form a frequent topic of discourse at the tea-tables in Huntingdon. The young man had a strong inclination to call on him; the father dissuaded him from this, because it was said that the stranger rather declined society than sought it. One day, however, as they came out of church after the morning prayers, Unwin, seeing him take a solitary walk under a row of trees, accosted and joined him there, and finding that his advances were received to his wish, engaged himself to drink tea with him that afternoon. "To my inexpressible joy," says Cowper, in his Memoir, "I found him one whose notions of religion were spiritual and lively; one whom the Lord had been training from his infancy to the service of the Temple. We opened our hearts to each other at the first interview; and when we parted I immediately retired to my chamber, and prayed the Lord, who had been the author, to be the guardian, of our friendship; to give it fervency and perpetuity even unto death; and I doubt not that my gracious Father has heard this prayer also."

Morley Unwin, the father of the young man, was at this time far advanced in years. He had been master of the free school, and lecturer to the two churches in Huntingdon, before he obtained a college living; and while in expectation of one, formed an engagement with a lady much younger than himself, Mary Cawthorne by name, the daughter of a draper in Ely; she was a person of lively talents, with a sweet, serene countenance; and she was remarkably fond of reading. Upon succeeding to the living of Grimstone, in Norfolk, he married and took up his abode there; but Mrs. Unwin liked neither the situation nor the society of that sequestered place; and she prevailed on him to return to Huntingdon, where he was known and respected. Accordingly he took a large, convenient house in the High Street there, and prepared a few pupils for the University. His only children were a son and daughter. Hayley remembered having noticed them at Cambridge in the year 1763, as a youth and damsel of countenances uncommonly pleasing.

On the Sunday, after the first interview with the son, Cowper dined with the family, and had much discourse with Mrs. Unwin. He says, in his Memoir, "I am not at liberty to describe the pleasure I had in conversing with her, because she will be one of the first who will have the perusal of this narrative; let it suffice to say, we had one faith, and had been baptized with the same baptism. When I returned to my lodging, I gave thanks to God, who had so graciously answered my prayers, by bringing me into the society of Christians."

The family into which Cowper was soon to be adopted, he thus described to Lady Hesketh:³⁰ "They are indeed a nice set of folks, and suit me exactly. I should have been more particular in my account of Miss Unwin, if I had had materials for a minute description. She is about eighteen years of age, rather handsome and genteel. In her mother's company she says little; not because her mother requires it of her, but because she seems glad of that excuse for not talking, being somewhat inclined to bashfulness. There is the most remarkable cordiality between all the parts of the family; and the mother and daughter seem to dote upon each other. The first time I went to the house, I was introduced to the daughter alone; and sat with her near half an hour before her brother came in, who had appointed me to call upon him. Talking is necessary in a *tête-à-tête*, to distinguish the persons of the drama from the chairs they sit on: accordingly she talked a great deal, and exceedingly well; and, like the rest of the family, behaved with as much ease and address as if we had been old acquaintance. She resembles her mother in her great piety, who is one of the most remarkable instances of it I have ever seen. They are altogether the cheerfulest and most engaging family-piece it is possible to conceive. Since I wrote the above, I met Mrs. Unwin in the street, and went home with her. She and I walked together, near two hours, in the garden, and had a conversation which did me more good than I should have received from an audience of the first prince in Europe. That woman is a blessing to me, and I never see her with-

³⁰ Oct. 18, 1765.

out being the better for her company. I am treated in the family as if I was a near relation, and have been repeatedly invited to call upon them at all times. You know what a shy fellow I am ; I cannot prevail with myself to make so much use of this privilege as I am sure they intend I should ; but perhaps this awkwardness will wear off hereafter. It was my earnest request, before I left St. Alban's, that wherever it might please Providence to dispose of me, I might meet with such an acquaintance as I find in Mrs. Unwin. How happy it is to believe with a steadfast assurance, that our petitions are heard, even while we are making them ; and how delightful to meet with a proof of it, in the effectual and actual grant of them ! Surely it is a gracious finishing given to those means which the Almighty has been pleased to make use of for my conversion. After having been deservedly rendered unfit for any society, to be again qualified for it, and admitted at once into the fellowship of those whom God regards as the excellent of the earth, and whom, in the emphatical language of Scripture, he preserves as the apple of his eye, is a blessing, which carries with it the stamp and visible superscription of divine bounty ; a grace unlimited as undeserved ; and, like its glorious Author, free in its course and blessed in its operation."

The different tone in which he describes these new friends to Hill is remarkable, though the same regard and liking for them are expressed.³¹ "I have added another family to the number of those I was acquainted with, when you were here. Their name is Unwin — the most agreeable people imaginable ; quite sociable, and as free from the ceremonious civility of country gentlefolks as any I ever met with. They treat me more like a near relation than a stranger, and their house is always open to me. The old gentleman carries me to Cambridge in his chaise. He is a man of learning and good sense, and as simple as parson Adams. His wife has a very uncommon understanding, has read much, to excellent purpose, and is more polite than a duchess. The son, who belongs to Cambridge, is a most amiable young

³¹ Oct. 25, 1765.

man, and the daughter quite of a piece with the rest of the family. They see but little company, which suits me exactly ; go when I will, I find a house full of peace and cordiality in all its parts, and am sure to hear no scandal, but such discourse, instead of it, as we are all better for. You remember Rousseau's description of an English morning ; such are the mornings I spend with these good people ; and the evenings differ from them in nothing, except that they are still more snug, and quieter. Now I know them, I wonder that I liked Huntingdon so well before I knew them, and am apt to think I should find every place disagreeable, that had not an Unwin belonging to it.

" This incident convinces me of the truth of an observation I have often made, that when we circumscribe our estimate of all that is clever within the limits of our own acquaintance (which I at least have always been apt to do) we are guilty of very uncharitable censure upon the rest of the world, and of a narrowness of thinking disgraceful to ourselves. Wapping and Redriff may contain some of the most amiable persons living, and such as one would go to Wapping and Redriff to make acquaintance with."

When Cowper was " revolving in his mind the nature of his situation, and beginning for the first time to find an irksomeness in such retirement," a thought suddenly struck him ; he should not fear, he says, to call it a suggestion of the good providence of God which had brought him to Huntingdon. " Suddenly it occurred to me, that I might probably find a place in Mr. Unwin's family as a boarder. A young gentleman, who had lived with him as a pupil, was the day before gone to Cambridge. It appeared to me, at least, possible, that I might be allowed to succeed him. From the moment this thought struck me, such a tumult of anxious solicitude seized me, that for two or three days I could not divert my mind to any other subject. I blamed and condemned myself for want of submission to the Lord's will ; but still the language of my mutinous and disobedient heart was, ' Give me the blessing, or else I die ! '

" About the third evening after I had determined upon this measure, I, at length, made shift to fasten my thoughts upon a theme which had no manner of connection with it.

While I was pursuing my meditations, Mr. Unwin and family quite out of sight, my attention was suddenly called home again by the words which had been continually playing in my mind, and were, at length, repeated with such importunity that I could not help regarding them, — ‘The Lord God of truth will do this.’ I was effectually convinced that they were not of my own production, and accordingly I received from them some assurance of success; but my unbelief and fearfulness robbed me of much of the comfort they were intended to convey; though I have since had many a blessed experience of the same kind, for which I can never be sufficiently thankful. I immediately began to negotiate the affair, and in a few days it was entirely concluded.”

Economy was one urgent motive for this change, which in other respects also was so consonant with his inclinations. “I find it impossible,” he says to Hill, “to proceed any longer in my present course without danger of bankruptcy. I have therefore entered into an agreement with the Rev. Mr. Unwin to lodge and board with him. The family are the most agreeable in the world. They live in a special good house, and in a very genteel way. They are all exactly what I could wish them to be, and I know I shall be as happy with them as I can be on this side of the sun. I did not dream of the matter till about five days ago; but now the whole is settled. I shall transfer myself thither as soon as I have satisfied all demands upon me here.”³²

On Nov. 11, 1765, Cowper took possession of his new abode, and became an inmate of Mr. Unwin’s family. “I here found a place of rest,” he says, “prepared for me by God’s own hand, where he has given me abundant means of furtherance in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus, both by the study of his word, and communion with his dear disciples. May nothing but death interrupt it! Peace be with the reader, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.” With these words he concludes the account of his own life and sufferings, which he drew up at Huntingdon, for the satisfaction of these new friends.

But Cowper had not yet learned to proportion his ways

³² Nov. 5, 1765.

to his means. In the same communication that announced his intended removal, and acknowledged the danger of out-running his income, which rendered it necessary, he tells his friend,

"I wrote to you about ten days ago,
Soliciting a quick return of gold,
To purchase certain horse that like me well."

"I am become a professed horseman," he says in a former letter, "and do hereby assume to myself the style and title of the Knight of the Bloody Spur. It has cost me much to bring this point to bear; but I think I have at last accomplished it."³³

When he first learnt from Lady Hesketh how kindly his relations were disposed to act towards him, he was much affected by this proof of their regard. "If they really interest themselves," said he, "in my welfare, it is a mark of their great charity for one who has been a disappointment and a vexation to them ever since he has been of consequence to be either. My friend the major's behavior to me, after all he suffered by my abandoning his interest and my own in so miserable a manner, is a noble instance of generosity and true greatness of mind; and, indeed, I know no man in whom those qualities are more conspicuous. One need only furnish him with an opportunity to display them, and they are always ready to show themselves in his words and actions, and even in his countenance, at a moment's warning. I have great reason to be thankful I have lost none of my acquaintance, but those whom I determined not to keep. I am sorry this class is so numerous."³⁴

He had not long been domesticated with the Unwins, when he received a letter from his uncle Ashley, "giving him to understand in the gentlest terms, and in such as *he* was sure to choose, that the family were not a little displeased at having learnt that he kept a servant; and that he maintained a boy also, whom he had brought with him from St. Alban's." Two or three letters were exchanged between them on this subject, and Cowper did not alter his plan, though his uncle told him, as softly as he could, there was

³³ Aug. 14, 1765.
VOL. I.

³⁴ To Lady Hesketh, Aug. 1, 1765.

danger lest the offence taken by his relations should operate to the prejudice of his income. Shortly after this correspondence had ceased, "my brother," says Cowper, "went to town, where his stay was short, and, when I saw him next, gave me the following intelligence: that my cousin (the colonel) had been the mover of this storm; that finding me inflexible, he had convened the family on the occasion, had recommended it to them not to give to one who knew so little how to make a right use of their bounty, and declared that for his own part he would not, and that he had accordingly withdrawn his contribution. My brother added, however, that my good friend Sir Thomas (Hesketh) had stepped into his place, and made good the deficiency."³⁵

The colonel's contribution, however, was not withdrawn;³⁶ his object seems to have been to make his kinsman feel the propriety of observing a due economy under his peculiar circumstances, and the injustice of doing generous acts at the expense of others. On this occasion Cowper received two affecting proofs of sincere friendship. The first may best be related in his own words to Lady Hesketh: "I have a word or two more to say on the same subject. While this troublesome matter was in agitation, and I expected little less than to be abandoned by the family, I received an anonymous letter, in a hand entirely strange to me, by the post. It was conceived in the kindest and most benevolent terms imaginable, exhorting me not to distress myself with fears lest the threatened event should take place; for that, whatever deduction of my income might happen, the defect

³⁵ To Lady Hesketh, Jan. 2, 1786.

³⁶ "Being thus informed," says Cowper to Lady Hesketh in this letter, "or as it seems now misinformed, you will not wonder, my dear, that I no longer regarded the colonel as my friend, or that I have not inquired after him from that day to the present. But when speaking of him you express yourself thus, *who you know has been so constantly your friend!* I feel myself more than reconciled to him; I feel a sincere affection for him, convinced that he could not have acted toward me, as my brother had heard, without your knowledge of it."

John Cowper could not have been misinformed, as his brother chose to believe. The fact appears to have been as stated in the text. The colonel threatened seriously,—but did not choose to be outdone in generosity towards a kinsman whom he loved; and was probably satisfied when he saw how much the next year's expenses were reduced.

should be supplied by a person who loved me tenderly and approved my conduct. I wish I knew who dictated this letter. I have seen, not long since, a style most excessively like it." Evidently he supposed it to have come from Lady Hesketh herself; and from her—or her sister Theodora—no doubt it came.

The other proof of true friendship was given by Mrs. Unwin: "Though I had not," he says, "been ten months in the family, Mrs. Unwin generously offered me my place under her roof, with all the same accommodation, (and undertook to manage that matter with her husband,) at half the stipulated payment."

After his removal from lodgings, a pause of some months ensued in his correspondence with Lady Hesketh. When she had renewed it, he wrote thus to her:—

MY DEAR COUSIN,

Huntingdon, March 6, 1766.

I have for some time past imputed your silence to the cause which you yourself assign for it, viz. to my change of situation; and was even sagacious enough to account for the frequency of your letters to me while I lived alone, from your attention to me in a state of such solitude, as seemed to make it an act of particular charity to write to me. I bless God for it, I was happy even then; solitude has nothing gloomy in it if the soul points upwards. St. Paul tells his Hebrew converts, "Ye are come (already come) to Mount Sion, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant." When this is the case, as surely it was with them, or the Spirit of Truth had never spoken it, there is an end of the melancholy and dulness of life at once. You will not suspect me, my dear cousin, of a design to understand this passage literally. But this, however, it certainly means; that a lively faith is able to anticipate, in some measure, the joys of that heavenly society which the soul shall actually possess hereafter.

Since I have changed my situation, I have found still greater cause of thanksgiving to the Father of all mercies. The family with whom I live are Christians; and it has

pleased the Almighty to bring me to the knowledge of them, that I may want no means of improvement in that temper and conduct which he is pleased to require in all his servants.

My dear cousin ! one half of the Christian world would call this madness, fanaticism, and folly : but are not these things warranted by the word of God, not only in the passages I have cited, but in many others ? If we have no communion with God here, surely we can expect none hereafter. A faith that does not place our conversation in heaven ; that does not warm the heart, and purify it too ; that does not, in short, govern our thought, word, and deed, is no faith, nor will it obtain for us any spiritual blessing here, or hereafter. Let us see, therefore, my dear cousin, that we do not deceive ourselves in a matter of such infinite moment. The world will be ever telling us, that we are good enough ; and the world will vilify us behind our backs. But it is not the world which tries the heart ; that is the prerogative of God alone. My dear cousin ! I have often prayed for you behind your back, and now I pray for you to your face. There are many who would not forgive me this wrong ; but I have known you so long, and so well, that I am not afraid of telling you how sincerely I wish for your growth in every Christian grace, in every thing that may promote and secure your everlasting welfare.

I am obliged to Mrs. Cowper for the book, which, you perceive, arrived safe. I am willing to consider it as an intimation on her part, that she would wish me to write to her, and shall do it accordingly. My circumstances are rather particular, such as call upon my friends, those I mean who are truly such, to take some little notice of me ; and will naturally make those, who are not such in sincerity, rather shy of doing it. To this I impute the silence of many with regard to me, who, before the affliction that befell me, were ready enough to converse with me.

Yours, ever,

W. C.

He was probably right in accounting for the former frequency of her letters, as well as for their latter cessation.

Lady Hesketh had a sisterly love for him, but he addressed her in a strain to which no one who did not entirely sympathize in his religious views could have any satisfaction in replying. That sympathy he found in Mrs. Cowper, wife of the colonel, who was first cousin both to him and her husband, and sister to Martin Madan, at that time chaplain to the Lock Hospital, and one of the most distinguished of those clergy, who, in their style of preaching, approached the then rising body of the Methodists, in proportion as they departed from the standard of the church. Cowper, when his malady was at the height, had sent for this kinsman, whom he used to think an enthusiast; he fancied that if there were any balm in Gilead, he must be the physician to administer it. Mrs. Cowper appears to have been one of her brother's converts; the book alluded to in the preceding letter was Pearsall's Meditations, and it gave her cousin an occasion of writing to her, which was all that he had waited for; for the renewal of intercourse with his friends was a point on which he was peculiarly sensitive. He says to her, "My friends must excuse me if I write to none but those who lay it fairly in my way to do so. The inference I am apt to draw from their silence is, that they wish me to be silent too."³⁷

In this letter he says, "Your brother Martin has been very kind to me, having written to me twice, in a style which, though it was once irksome to me, to say the least, I now know how to value. I pray God to forgive me the many light things I have both said and thought of him and his labors. Hereafter I shall consider him as a burning and a shining light, and as one of those who, having turned many to righteousness, shall shine hereafter as the stars forever and ever. So much for the state of my heart; as to my spirits, I am cheerful and happy, and having peace with God, have peace within myself. For the continuance of this blessing, I trust to Him who gave it; and they who trust in Him shall never be confounded." The lady in whose house he lived was, he says, so excellent a person, and regarded him with a friendship so truly Christian, that he

³⁷ March 11, 1766.

could almost fancy his own mother restored to life again, to compensate to him for all the friends he had lost, and all his connections broken.

His correspondence with Mrs. Cowper became as frequent now as it had been with Lady Hesketh, and except when the Unwins were mentioned, it was wholly of a religious character: "I thank God," he says, "that I have those among my kindred to whom I can write without reserve my sentiments upon this subject, as I do to you. A letter upon any other subject is more insipid to me than even my task was when a schoolboy; and I say not this in vain glory, — God forbid! — but to show you what the Almighty, whose name I am unworthy to mention, has done for me, the greatest of sinners. Once he was a terror to me, and his service, oh what a weariness it was! Now I can say, I love Him and his holy name, and am never so happy as when I speak of his mercies to me."³⁸

At this time he had many anxious thoughts about taking orders. "I believe,"³⁹ said he, "every new convert is apt to think himself called upon for that purpose; but it has pleased God, by means which there is no need to particularize, to give me full satisfaction as to the propriety of declining it. Indeed, they who have the least idea of what I have suffered from the dread of public exhibitions, will readily excuse my never attempting them hereafter. In the mean time, if it please the Almighty, I may be an instrument of turning many to the truth in a private way, and hope that my endeavors in this way have not been entirely unsuccessful."⁴⁰ Had I the zeal of Moses, I should need an Aaron to be my spokesman."

³⁸ Sept. 3, 1766.

³⁹ To Mrs. Cowper, Oct. 20, 1766.

⁴⁰ In the Memoir which Mr. Greatheed "revised, corrected, and recommended," it is said, "The usefulness to which he alludes in this passage, was no less than the conversion of almost all Mr. Unwin's family. The consequent alteration of their conduct excited the surprise and displeasure of their former intimates, whose round of amusements had long been undisturbed by appearances of genuine godliness. They regretted that a man of Mr. Cowper's accomplishments should have been spoiled for society by religion, and still more, that his delusion should have infected a family so extensively connected as Mr. Unwin's with the polite inhabitants. That connection was soon dissolved; and their resentment of the change vented itself in a calumny,

Mrs. Cowper had inquired particularly concerning the manner in which he passed his time. He replied, "As to amusements, I mean what the world calls such, we have none : the place indeed swarms with them ; and cards and dancing are the professed business of almost all the *gentle* inhabitants of Huntingdon. We refuse to take part in them, or to be accessaries to this way of murdering our time, and by so doing have acquired the name of Methodists. Having told you how we *do not* spend our time, I will next say how we do. We breakfast commonly between eight and nine ; till eleven we read either the Scripture, or the sermons of some faithful preacher of those holy mysteries ; at eleven we attend divine service, which is performed here twice every day ; and from twelve to three we separate, and amuse ourselves as we please. During that interval, I either read, in my own apartment, or walk, or ride, or work in the garden. We seldom sit an hour after dinner, but, if the weather permits, adjourn to the garden, where, with Mrs. Unwin and her son, I have generally the pleasure of religious conversation till tea-time. If it rains, or is too windy for walking, we either converse within doors, or sing some hymns of Martin's collection, and by the help of Mrs. Unwin's harpsichord, make up a tolerable concert, in which our hearts, I hope, are the best and most musical performers. After tea we sally forth to walk in good earnest. Mrs. Unwin is a good walker, and we have generally travelled about four miles before we see home again. When the days are short, we make this excursion in the former part of the day, between church-time and dinner. At night we read, and converse, as before, till supper, and commonly finish the evening either with hymns, or a sermon, and last of all the family are called to prayers. I need not tell *you* that such a life as this is consistent with

to which a gross ignorance of the principles of Christian friendship afforded the sole support."

In the same narrative it is stated that Mrs. Unwin "had been remarkable for gayety and vivacity ; but that she soon, notwithstanding, fully entered into Mr. Cowper's religious views, and discovered a change of character that was far from being agreeable to her fashionable acquaintance."

This is altogether inconsistent with Cowper's own account, which has been faithfully incorporated in the text.

the utmost cheerfulness ; accordingly we are all happy, and dwell together in unity as brethren. Mrs. Unwin has almost a maternal affection for me, and I have something very like a filial one for her, and her son and I are brothers. Blessed be the God of our salvation for such companions, and for such a life, above all for a heart to like it."

The last of his letters, during this part of his life, to Lady Hesketh, gives a striking description of the neighborhood, and of his own state of mind.

MY DEAR LADY HESKETH,

Jan. 30, 1767.

I am glad you spent your summer in a place so agreeable to you. As to me, my lot is cast in a country where we have neither woods nor commons, nor pleasant prospects ; all flat and insipid ; in the summer adorned only with blue willows, and in the winter covered with a flood. Such it is at present : our bridges shaken almost in pieces ; our poor willows torn away by the roots, and our haycocks almost afloat. Yet even here we are happy ; at least I am so ; and if I have no groves with benches conveniently disposed, nor commons overgrown with thyme to regale me, neither do I want them. You thought to make my mouth water at the charms of Taplow, but you see you are disappointed.

My dear cousin ! I am a living man ; and I can never reflect that I am so, without recollecting at the same time that I have infinite cause of thanksgiving and joy. This makes every place delightful to me, where I can have leisure to meditate upon those mercies by which I live, and indulge a vein of gratitude to that gracious God, who has snatched me like a brand out of the burning. Where had I been but for his forbearance and long-suffering ? even with those who shall never see his face in hope, to whom the name of Jesus, by the just judgment of God, is become a torment instead of a remedy. Thoughtless and inconsiderate wretch that I was ! I lived as if I had been my own creator, and could continue my existence to what length, and in what state I pleased ; as if dissipation was the narrow way which leads to life, and a neglect of the blessed God would certainly end in the enjoyment of Him. But it pleased the Almighty to convince me of my fatal error before it indeed became

such; to convince me that in communion with Him we may find that happiness for which we were created, and that a life without God in the world, is a life of trash, and the most miserable delusion. Oh how had my own corruptions, and Satan together, blinded and befooled me! I thought the service of my Maker and Redeemer a tedious and unnecessary labor; I despised those who thought otherwise; and if they spoke of the love of God, I pronounced them madmen — as if it were possible to serve and to love the Almighty Being too much, with whom we must dwell forever, or be forever miserable without him.

Would I were the only one that had ever dreamed this dream of folly and wickedness! but the world is filled with such, who furnish a continual proof of God's almost unprovokable mercy; who set up for themselves in a spirit of independence upon Him who made them, and yet enjoy that life by his bounty, which they abuse to his dishonor. You remember me, my dear cousin, one of this trifling and deluded multitude. Great and grievous afflictions were applied to awaken me out of this deep sleep, and, under the influence of divine grace, have, I trust, produced the effect for which they were intended. If the way in which I had till that time proceeded had been according to the word and will of God, God had never interposed to change it. That He did is certain; though others may not be so sensible of that interposition, yet I am sure of it. To think as I once did, therefore, must be wrong. Whether to think as I now do be right or not, is a question that can only be decided by the word of God; at least it is capable of no other decision, till the great day determine it finally. I see, and see plainly, in every page and period of that word, my former heedlessness and forgetfulness of God condemned. I see a life of union and communion with him inculcated and enjoined as an essential requisite. To this, therefore, it must be the business of our lives to attain, and happy is he who makes the greatest progress in it. This is no fable, but it is our life. If we stand at the left hand of Christ while we live, we shall stand there too in the judgment. The separation must be begun in this world, which in that day shall be made forever. My dear cousin! may the Son

of God, who shall then assign to each his everlasting station, direct and settle all your thoughts upon this important subject. Whether you must think as I do, or not, is not the question; but it is indeed an awful question, whether the word of God be the rule of our actions, and his Spirit the principle by which we act. Search the Scriptures; for in them ye believe ye have eternal life.

This letter will be Mr. Howe's⁴¹ companion to London. I wish his company were more worthy of him, but it is not fit it should be less. I pray God to bless you, and remember you where I never forget those I love.

Yours and Sir Thomas's affectionate friend,

WM. COWPER.

Here the correspondence with Lady Hesketh appears to have ceased: he could take no pleasure at this time in any other strain, and she probably thought that it was dangerous for him to dwell constantly upon this. But to Mrs. Cowper he continued to write; and from what he says to her, it may be inferred that for the reason assigned he had dropped the communication with his more beloved cousin. "To find,"⁴² he says, "those whom I love clearly and strongly persuaded of evangelical truth, gives me a pleasure superior to any this world can afford me. Judge, then, whether your letter, in which the body and substance of a saving faith is so evidently set forth, could meet with a lukewarm reception at my hands, or be entertained with indifference! Would you know the true reason of my long silence? Conscience that my religious principles are generally excepted against, and that the conduct they produce, wherever they are heartily maintained, is still more the object of disapprobation than those principles themselves; and remembering that I had made both the one and the other known to you, without having any clear assurance that our faith in Jesus was of the same stamp and character, I could not help thinking it possible that you might disapprove both my

⁴¹ Probably some work of Howe's which he was sending to Lady Hesketh.

⁴² March 11, 1767.

sentiments and practice ; that you might think the one unsupported by Scripture, and the other whimsical, and unnecessarily strict and rigorous, and consequently would be rather pleased with the suspension of a correspondence, which a different way of thinking upon so momentous a subject as that we wrote upon, was likely to render tedious and irksome to you.

"I have told you the truth from my heart ; forgive me these injurious suspicions, and never imagine that I shall hear from you upon this delightful theme without a real joy, or without prayer to God to prosper you in the way of his truth, his sanctifying and saving truth."

The younger Unwin happened to be coming from London to Huntingdon at that time : he gave him an introduction, and desired him to call on Mrs. Cowper in his way. "If you knew him," said he, "as well as I do, you would love him as much. But I leave the young man to speak for himself, which he is very able to do. He is ready possessed of an answer to every question you can possibly ask concerning me ; and knows my *whole story* from first to last."⁴³ After his friend's return, he acknowledged wherefore he had thus introduced him. "My dear cousin," said he, "you sent my friend Unwin home to us charmed with your kind reception of him, and with every thing he saw at the Park. Shall I once more give you a peep into my vile and deceitful heart ? What motive do you think lay at the bottom of my conduct, when I desired him to call upon you ? I did not suspect, at first, that pride and vain glory had any share in it ; but quickly after I had recommended the visit to him, I discovered, in that fruitful soil, the very root of the matter. You know I am a stranger here ; all such are suspected characters, unless they bring their credentials with them. To this moment, I believe, it is matter of speculation in the place, whence I came, and to whom I belong.

"Though my friend, you may suppose, before I was admitted an inmate here, was satisfied that I was not a mere vagabond, and has, since that time, received more convin-

⁴³ March 14, 1767.

cing proofs of my *sponsibility*; yet I could not resist the opportunity of furnishing him with ocular demonstration of it, by introducing him to one of my most splendid connections; that when he hears me called ‘*That fellow Cowper,*’ which has happened heretofore, he may be able, upon unquestionable evidence, to assert my gentlemanhood, and relieve me from the weight of that opprobrious appellation. Oh Pride! pride! it deceives with the subtlety of a serpent, and seems to walk erect, though it crawls upon the earth. How will it twist and twine itself about, to get from under the Cross, which it is the glory of our Christian calling to be able to bear with patience and good will. They who can guess at the heart of a stranger, — and you especially, who are of a compassionate temper, — will be more ready, perhaps, to excuse me, in this instance, than I can be to excuse myself. But, in good truth, it was abominable pride of heart, indignation, and vanity, and deserves no better name.”⁴⁴

In this letter he expresses his satisfaction that Mrs. Cowper was now acquainted so *particularly* with *all* the circumstances of his story. “Her secrecy and discretion,” he said, “might, he knew, be trusted with any thing. A thread of mercy ran through all the intricate mazes of those afflictive providences, which were so mysterious to himself at the time, and which must ever remain so to all who would not see what was the great design of them.”

Cowper had always been fond of plants. When he lived in the Temple he used to purchase myrtles almost every year in Covent Garden: it was necessary thus annually to replace them, “because, even in that airy situation,” he said, “they were sure to lose their leaf⁴⁵ in winter, and seldom recovered it again in spring.”⁴⁶ He now commenced florist and horticulturist at Huntingdon.

⁴⁴ April 3, 1767.

⁴⁵ So Cowley says of a nobler plant, and finds in the fact a similitude, the truth of which Cowper would have felt.

*Rura laudamus merito portæ;
Rura floremus; dominoque laurum,
Sole gaudentem, necat oppidorum
Nubilus ær.*

⁴⁶ March 14, 1767.

"If the major," says he to Mrs. Cowper, "can make up a small packet of seeds, that will make a figure in a garden, where we have little else besides jessamine and honeysuckle, (such a packet as may be put into one's fob,) I will promise to take great care of them, as I ought to value natives of the Park. They must not be such, however, as require great skill in the management, for at present I have no skill to spare." Unwin brought the seeds with him; "they will spring up," said Cowper, "like so many mementos to remind me of my friends at the Park."⁴⁷ His attention was directed more to the useful than the ornamental departments of horticulture. "Having commenced gardening," he says to Hill, "I study the arts of pruning, sowing, and planting; and enterprise every thing in that way, from melons down to cabbages. I have a large garden to display my abilities in; and were we twenty miles nearer London, I might turn higgler, and serve your honor with cauliflowers and brocoli at the best hand."

Careless as Cowper had been of acquiring any legal reputation, it appears that some respect was paid to him in the profession; his determination to take no further part in the common business of the world was known only to his most intimate connections, and a letter reached him at Huntingdon, announcing his appointment to the honorary office of lecturer at Lyon's Inn. Upon this he wrote to Hill in that pleasant and natural strain from which he never departed in his correspondence with that old and confidential friend; "Dear Sephus, Notwithstanding it is so agreeable a thing to read law lectures to the students of Lyon's Inn, especially to the reader himself, I must beg leave to waive it. Danby Pickering must be the happy man; and I heartily wish him joy of his deputyship. As to the treat, I think if it goes before the lecture, it will be apt to blunt the apprehension of the students; and if it comes after, it may erase from their memories impressions so newly made. I could wish, therefore, that for their benefit and behoof, this circumstance were omitted. But if it be absolutely necessary, I hope Mr. Salt, or whoever takes the conduct

⁴⁷ May 14, 1767.

of it, will see that it be managed with the frugality and temperance becoming so learned a body. I shall be obliged to you if you will present my respects to Mr. Treasurer Salt, and express my concern, at the same time, that he had the trouble of sending me two letters upon the occasion. The first of them never came to hand."⁴⁸

In his next letter, answering item by item the reply which he had received to this, he says, "Fourthly, I do recollect that I myself am a little guilty of what I blame so much in Mr. E., having returned you so facetious an answer to your serious inquiry concerning the entertainment to be given, or not to be given, to the gentlemen of Lyon's Inn, that you must needs have been at a loss to collect from it my real intentions. My sincere desire, however, in this respect is, that they may fast; and being supported in this resolution, not only by an assurance that I can, and therefore ought, to make a better use of my money, but also by the examples of my predecessors in the same business, Mr. Barrington and Mr. Schutz, I have no longer any doubt concerning the propriety of condemning them to abstinence upon this occasion; and cannot but wish that point may be carried, if it can be done without engaging you in the trouble of any disagreeable haggling and higgling and twisting and wriggling to save my money."⁴⁹

Having inquired whether his "exchequer was full or empty, and whether the revenue of last year was yet come in, that he might proportion his payments to the exigencies of his affairs;" his chancellor of the exchequer returned an answer which called forth a lively expression of satisfaction: "I am glad that you have received your money on my account, and am still more pleased that you have so much in bank, after the remittances already made. But that which increases my joy to the highest pitch of possible augmentation, is that you expect to receive more shortly." The satisfaction was not of long continuance: after a few months he says to Sephus, "If every dealer and chapman was connected with creditors like you, the poor commissioners of bankrupts would be ruined. I can only wonder at you,

⁴⁸ Nov. 8, 1765.

⁴⁹ Dec. 3, 1765.

considering my knack at running in debt, and my slender ability to pay. After all, I am afraid that the poor stock must suffer. — My finances will never be able to satisfy these craving necessities, without leaving my debt to you entirely unsatisfied. And though I know you are sincere in what you say, and as willing to wait for your money as heart can wish, yet *quære*, whether the next half year, which will bring its expenses with it, will be more propitious to you than the present? The succeeding half years may bear a close resemblance to their insolvent predecessors continually; and unless we break bank some time or other, your proposal of payment may be always what it is at present. What matters it, therefore, to relieve the stock, which must come to execution at last?"⁵⁰

The sacrifice of stock probably removed all present pressure, and the terms upon which the Unwins had entertained him as one of the family, must have placed him comparatively at ease, when their establishment was broken up by the dreadful circumstance of Mr. Unwin's death. In July, 1767, going on a Sunday morning to serve his church, he was thrown from his horse, and the back part of his skull was fractured.⁵¹ "At nine o'clock," says Cowper, "he was in perfect health, and as likely to live twenty years as either of us; and before ten was stretched speechless and senseless upon a flock-bed, in a poor cottage, where (it being impossible to remove him) he died on Thursday evening. I heard his dying groans, the effect of great agony, for he was a strong man, and much convulsed in his last moments. The few short intervals of sense that were indulged him, he

⁵⁰ Oct. 27, 1766.

⁵¹ A biographer of Cowper, when he relates this event, annexes the following note: "Non-residence can never be reconciled with the full and due discharge of the duties of a Christian ministry. It has always appeared to us, therefore, singularly inconsistent with the piety of the Unwins to have encouraged such a dereliction. Nor does it seem remote from an evident dispensation, that the stay of the family should be thus awfully removed in the very act of inconsistency. But who shall dare

To penetrate the inscrutable designs
Of Him, whose counsel is his sovereign will?"

When Dr. Memes called to mind these verses, he ought to have suppressed his note.

spent in earnest prayer, and in expressions of a firm trust and confidence in the only Savior. To that strong-hold we must all resort at last, if we would have hope in our death. When every other refuge fails, we are glad to fly to the only shelter to which we can repair to any purpose ; and happy is it for us, when, the false ground we have chosen for ourselves, being broken under us we find ourselves obliged to have recourse to the rock which can never be shaken — when this is our lot, we receive great and undeserved mercy.”⁵²

To Mrs. Cowper he says, “ This awful dispensation has left an impression upon our spirits, which will not presently be worn off. — May it be a lesson to us to watch, since we know not the day, nor the hour, when the Lord cometh. The effect of it upon my circumstances will only be a change of the place of my abode. For I shall still, by God’s leave, continue with Mrs. Unwin, whose behavior to me has always been that of a mother to a son. We know not yet where we shall settle ; but we trust that the Lord, whom we seek, will go before us, and prepare a rest for us. We have employed our friend Haweis, Dr. Conyers of Helmsley, in Yorkshire, and Mr. Newton of Olney, to look out a place for us ; but at present are entirely ignorant under which of the three we shall settle, or whether under either. I have written to my aunt Madan, to desire Martin to assist us with his inquiries.”

CHAPTER VII.

COWPER’S REMOVAL TO OLNEY. HIS BROTHER’S DEATH.

ALEXANDER KNOX, in his admirable letter on Divine Providence,¹ when he observes how extremely difficult it is to find genuine specimens of special superintendence, mentions Cowper as one of the extraordinary instances in which it is almost impossible for those who are capable of discerning

⁵² To Mr. Hill, July 16.

¹ Remains, vol. ii. 263—264.

moral qualities, and appreciating moral effects, not to recognize the marks of providential designation: "I grant," he says, "there was (in his case) something awfully obscure; but through that obscurity, such rays of providential light dart forth, as to make the special designation not less clear than the singular sufferings were mysterious." As another example he instances Mr. Newton, one of the three clergymen of whom Cowper and Mrs. Unwin thought so highly, that they were willing to settle under the ministry of either, and seemed to have no other choice in settling than that they might be under one of them, or some minister of the same description.

Mr. Newton's life is too remarkable in all its circumstances to be treated episodically and epitomized in this place. Suffice it here to say, that he had been captain of a Liverpool slave-ship; and that after much suffering, and many deliverances, which might well be deemed providential, wakening to a sense of God's mercy, had taken orders in the established church, and was then curate of Olney. They knew him only by report at the time of Mr. Unwin's death. About six months before that dreadful event, Dr. Conyers had been taking his degree in divinity at Cambridge, and there became acquainted with the younger Unwin: what he heard from him of his mother's religious character, induced him to mention her to Mr. Newton, and request that when he should be passing through Huntingdon he would take the opportunity of making her a visit. "That visit, so important in its consequences to the destiny of Cowper, happened to take place within a few days after the calamitous death of Mr. Unwin."² It was indeed a comfort to meet with such an adviser at such a time. He proposed that they should fix their abode at Olney, and offered to look out a house for them, and assist in their removal. Accordingly he engaged one so near the vicarage in which he lived, that by opening a doorway in the garden wall, they could communicate without going into the street. It was necessary that they should remove at Michaelmas, and as the house was not ready for their reception, Mr. Newton seems to have received them as his guests.

² Hayley.

"I have no map to consult at present," says Cowper in his first letter from Olney, to his friend Sephus, "but by what remembrance I have of this place in the last I saw, it lies at the northernmost point of the county. We are just five miles beyond Newport Pagnell. I am willing to suspect that you make this inquiry with a *view* to an *interview*, when time shall serve. We may possibly be settled in our own house in about a month, where so good a friend of mine will be extremely welcome to Mrs. Unwin. We shall have a bed, and a warm fireside at your service, if you can come before next summer; and if not, a parlor that looks the north wind full in the face, where you may be as cool as in the groves of Valombrosa."³

The part of the country in which Cowper had now set up his rest, is called by Hayley pleasing and picturesque. In comparison with Huntingdon it is so; not with the north of England, not with the west, not with the Severn counties. But there are few countries which a man disposed to seek for pleasure in rural objects may not find pleasing, few which an artist will not render picturesque; and Cowper has made Olney and its neighborhood poetical ground. The town, which is the most northerly in Buckinghamshire, consisted of one long street, the houses built of stone, but the far greater number thatched; the church large, and remarkable for its lofty spire. Lace-making was the business of the place, a sedentary and unwholesome employment;⁴ and a great proportion of the inhabitants were miserably poor. Lace-making and straw-platting, indeed, used to employ so many women, and so many children of all ages in this county, that the farmers even found it difficult to obtain hands for their ordinary work.⁵

³ Oct. 10, 1767.

⁴ Mr. Lysons observes, in his *Magna Britannia*, that "persons travelling through the counties where this manufacture prevails, have been struck with the sickly appearance of the women and children employed in it."

⁵ "When the Earl of Bridgewater came first to his estate at Ashridge, (in this county,) he found the boys unacquainted with any kind of husbandry, and unwilling to attend to any other employment but that which their mothers and sisters had taught them, viz., the platting of straw and making of lace. His lordship's first attention therefore was

At Olney the Ouse changes its character, and its course becomes so winding that the distance from that place to St. Neot's, which is about twenty miles by land, is about seventy by the stream. This has not escaped Drayton in his description of this "far-wandering" river, which he invokes Invention "exactly to set down."

Ouse having Oulney past, as she were waxed mad,
From her first stayder course immediately doth gad,
And in meandered gyres doth whirl herself about,
That, this way, here and there, back, forward, in and out;
And like a wanton girl, oft doubling in her gait,
In labyrinth-like turns and twinings intricate,
Thro those rich fields doth run.

But it was not for any attractions of the surrounding country, nor for any convenience of place or habitation, that Cowper and Mrs. Unwin had fixed upon Olney for their abode. He had once been what he called "an extravagant tramper," and thought that he had done himself "no good by pilgrimages of immoderate length."⁶ The walks here were beautiful, "but it was a walk to get at them," and they were only for fine weather: at other times "a gravel walk, thirty yards long, afforded but indifferent scope to the locomotive faculty, yet," he said, "it was all they had to move on for eight months in the year."⁷ He no longer kept a horse; the chief reason for that expense ceased when he removed too far from Cambridge to meet his brother once a week half way. And indeed he could now indulge in no superfluous expenditure, Mrs. Unwin's means being

to root out this effeminacy, and instil into them manly principles, and make them serviceable in employments in the field." This he effected, "and instead of seeing great lads, seventeen or eighteen years of age, sitting by their mother's side platting straw, or weaving lace, you saw at Ashridge many much younger occupied in the park, in the different employment of the seasons of the year: and much interest was made by boys to get into those employments."—*St. John Priest's View of the Agriculture of Buckinghamshire*, p. 319.

This Report noticed as a good custom which prevailed at Olney, and at no other place, that "farmers plough waste lands for the poor to plant potatoes, find half the seed, and take half the crop."—P. 346.

⁶ To Lady Hesketh, May 1, 1786.

⁷ To Mr. Newton, Aug. 5, 1786.

so much reduced by her husband's death, that their joint incomes did not more than suffice for their frugal establishment. The sole motive which directed them in their choice was that they might be under the pastoral care of Mr. Newton.

It is said by one of Cowper's biographers that though he had "clearly discerned and warmly embraced the leading truths of the gospel," he was till now "a stranger to the advantages of an evangelical ministry:"—the phraseology shows from what school the observation comes. "Their days," it is said by the same person, "were spent nearly as at Huntingdon, except the differences produced by a substitution of frequent evangelical worship for the daily form of prayer, the advantages of a more extended religious intercourse, and the peculiar friendship of Mr. Newton." That friendship could not be estimated above its value, Mr. Newton being a man whom it was impossible not to admire for his strength of heart, and the warmth and sincerity of his affections, and his vigorous intellect, and his sterling worth. A sincerer friend Cowper could not have found; he might have found a more discreet one. The advantages of a more extended religious intercourse depend wholly upon the description of that intercourse; and the difference between what is called "frequent evangelical worship" and the daily form of prayer, could have been no difference for the better to Mrs. Unwin, (the widow and the mother of a clergyman,) and to a person in Cowper's state of mind must have been greatly for the worse. The morning service which he attended every day at Huntingdon could induce no feelings except such as were calm, and soothing, and salutary,—none which would make him leave the church with an excited pulse, a flushed cheek, and a heated and throbbing head.

But what was likely to be the effect when he entered, at Olney, upon what has been called "a course of decided Christian happiness;" when it was "by no means a rare occurrence to find the man of trembling sensibilities praying by the sick bed of the poorest cottager, or (the height of distress to a feeling mind) guiding the devotions of some miserable being, who, having lived for the world, attempted

to seek God only in the departing moments of existence ? ”⁸ Mr. Newton had established prayer-meetings in his parish, and Cowper was required to take an active part at these meetings, — he who, by his own account, was one of those persons “to whom a public exhibition of themselves on any occasion is mortal poison ! ”⁹ We are assured, and no doubt with truth, that at these times he “poured forth his heart before God in earnest intercession, with a devotion equally simple, sublime, and fervent, adapted to the unusual combination of elevated genius, exquisite sensibility, and profound piety, that distinguished his mind.” Mr. Greatheed, by whom this was said in Cowper’s funeral sermon, proceeds to say, “It was, I believe, only on such occasions as these, that his constitutional diffidence was felt by him as a burden, during this happy portion of his life. I have heard him say, that when he expected to take the lead in your social worship, his mind was always greatly agitated for some hours preceding. But his trepidation wholly subsided as soon as he began to speak in prayer; and that timidity, which he invariably felt at every appearance before his fellow-creatures, gave place to an awful, yet delightful, consciousness of the presence of his Savior.”

Mr. Newton had

A frame of adamant, a soul of fire ;¹⁰

nothing could shake his nerves. But for Cowper to visit the sick and the dying, and to prepare himself by hours of nervous agitation for taking the lead in a prayer-meeting, with a constitution like his, and a mind which had already once been overthrown, — what could Dr. Cotton, if the question had been proposed to him, — what could any practitioner, who was acquainted with the circumstances of the case, or any person capable of forming an opinion upon such subjects, have expected — but the consequences that ensued ?

⁸ Mr. Cecil says, “Mr. Newton used to consider him as a sort of curate, from his constant attendance upon the sick and afflicted in that large and necessitous parish.”

⁹ See p. 84.

¹⁰ Dr. Johnson.

Several years afterwards, Lady Hesketh delivered her opinion to her sister Theodora upon the "course of decided Christian happiness" into which Cowper had been led when he settled under the ministry of Mr. Newton. "Mr. Newton is an excellent man, I make no doubt," said she, "and to a strong-minded man like himself, might have been of great use; but to such a mind, — such a tender mind, — and to such a wounded, yet lively imagination as our cousin's, I am persuaded that eternal praying and preaching were too much; nor could it, I think, be otherwise. One only proof of this I will give you, which our cousin mentioned a few days ago in casual conversation. The case was this: he was mentioning that for one or two summers, he had found himself under the necessity of taking his walk in the middle of the day, which he thought had hurt him a good deal; 'but,' continued he, 'I could not help it, for it was when Mr. Newton was here, and we made it a rule to pass four days in the week together. We dined at one; and it was Mr. Newton's rule for tea to be on table at four o'clock, for at six we broke up.' 'Well, then,' said I, 'if you had your time to yourself after six, you would have good time for an evening's walk, I should have thought.' 'No,' said he, 'after six we had service or lecture, or something of that kind, which lasted till supper.' I made no reply, but could not, and cannot, help thinking, they might have made a better use of a fine summer's evening than by shutting themselves up to make long prayers. I hope I honor religion, and feel a reverence for religious persons; but still (though I own the generality of the world are too careless, and devote too little time to these exercises) I do think there is something too puritanical in all this. Our Savior, I am sure, constantly speaks against it, and blames the Pharisees in more places than one, who dealt in vain repetitions, and who thought they should be heard for their much speaking. But I do not mean to give you my sentiments upon this conduct *generally*, but only as it might affect our cousin; and indeed, for him, I think it could not be either proper or wholesome."¹¹

¹¹ Early Productions of Cowper, &c. p. 68—70. Hayley, though evidently writing under some restraint, expresses a like opinion. He

The effect appears in his correspondence.¹² Though no man ever took more evident pleasure in conversing with his absent friends, he ceased writing to Lady Hesketh, and wrote only at long intervals to Mrs. Cowper. The character of his letters to Hill was changed; he still addressed him as Sephus, or dear Joe, but he wrote only on business; not coldly indeed, (for his affections were never chilled,) but briefly, and as if he were afraid of trespassing into a cheerful strain. Thanking him for "a full answer to an empty epistle," he says, "if Olney furnished any thing for your amusement, you should have it in return, but occurrences here are as scarce as cucumbers at Christmas."¹³ Subjects for a letter were never wanting, however, when he looked for them; he could raise them in all places and at all times, as easily as he raised cucumbers in their season.

In the same letter he says, "I visited St. Alban's about a fortnight since in person, and I visit it every day in thought. The recollection of what passed there, and the consequences that followed it, fill my mind continually, and make the circumstances of a poor, transient, half-spent life so insipid and unaffecting, that I have no heart to think or write much about them. Whether the nation is worshipping Mr. Wilkes, or any other idol, is of little moment to one who hopes, and believes, that he shall shortly stand in the presence of the

says, "When the nerves are tender, and the imagination tremblingly alive, any fervid excess in the exercise of the purest piety may be attended with such perils to corporeal and mental health, as men of a more firm and hardy fibre would be far from apprehending. Perhaps the life that Cowper led on his settling in Olney had a tendency to increase the morbid propensity of his frame, though it was a life of admirable sanctity." — Vol. i. 98.

¹² Mr. Thomas Taylor has observed this. "Owing to some cause," he says, "for which we are unable to account, Cowper's correspondence with his friends became much less frequent after his settlement at Olney than it had formerly been: probably it might be attributed, in some degree at least, to his close intimacy with Mr. Newton, for they were seldom seven waking hours apart from each other. The same vein of genuine and unaffected piety, however, runs through those letters which he did write, and they abound with remarks of uncommon excellence." — P. 86.

Those remarks are all of the same vein. The truth is, that one effect of what is called his "more extended religious intercourse" was to make that intercourse exclusive.

¹³ June 16, 1768.

great and blessed God. I thank Him, that he has given me such a deep-impressed persuasion of this awful truth, as a thousand worlds would not purchase from me. It gives me a relish to every blessing, and makes every trouble light."

The motive for this journey to St. Alban's was a charitable one. Scanty, and, indeed, uncertain, as his own means were when he left Dr. Cotton's, he took upon himself the charge of a little boy who was in imminent danger of ruin through the depravity of his parents, who were moreover as poor as they were depraved. This boy he put to school at Huntingdon, removed him, on his own removal, to Olney, and went now to St. Alban's in order to bind him apprentice¹⁴ to some useful trade.

The next letter to Hill was written on his friend's recovery from a dangerous illness, and Cowper took the fair occasion for entering upon a solemn strain.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

DEAR JOE,

Jan. 21, 1769.

I rejoice with you in your recovery, and that you have escaped from the hands of one from whose hands you will not always escape. Death is either the most formidable, or the most comfortable thing we have in prospect on this side of eternity. To be brought near to him, and to discern neither of these features in his face, would argue a degree of insensibility, of which I will not suspect my friend, whom I know to be a thinking man. You have been brought down to the sides of the grave, and you have been raised again by Him who has the keys of the invisible world; who opens, and none can shut; who shuts, and none can open. I do not forget to return thanks to Him on your behalf, and to pray that your life, which He has spared, may be devoted to his service. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock," is the word of Him, on whom both

¹⁴ The boy, however, was fixed as an apprentice at Oundle. In Mr. Greatheed's Memoir it is said that he afterwards settled at Olney, and married a favorite servant of Mr. Unwin, whose daughter, by a former husband, was likewise brought up by that lady. "It is to be lamented that neither she nor her father-in-law proved worthy of the charitable advantages by which they were distinguished."

our mortal and immortal life depend, and, blessed be his name! it is the word of one who wounds only that he may heal, and who waits to be gracious. The language of every such dispensation is, "Prepare to meet thy God." It speaks with the voice of mercy and goodness, for without such notices, whatever preparation we might make for other events, we should make none for this. My dear friend, I desire and pray, that when this last enemy shall come to execute an *unlimited* commission upon us, we may be found ready, being established and rooted in a well-grounded faith in His name, who conquered and triumphed over him upon his Cross.

Yours ever,

W. C.

The temper in which this was received may be understood from Cowper's reply to the letter that answered it.¹⁵ "I have a moment to spare, to tell you that your letter is just come to hand, and to thank you for it. I do assure you, the gentleness and candor of your manner engages my affection to you very much. You answer with mildness to an admonition which would have provoked many to anger. I have not time to add more, except just to hint, that if I am ever enabled to look forward to death with comfort, which, I thank God, is sometimes the case with me, I do not take my view of it from the top of my own works and deservings, though God is witness that the labor of my life is to keep a conscience void of offence towards Him. He is always formidable to me, but when I see him disarmed of his sting, by having sheathed it in the body of Christ Jesus."

Soon afterwards Hill invited him to London, wishing, no doubt, to bring him again into the circle of his relations, and within the influence of more genial circumstances. He replied:

DEAR JOE,

1769.

Sir Thomas crosses the Alps, and Sir Cowper, for that is his title at Olney, prefers his home to any other spot of earth in the world. Horace, observing this differ-

¹⁵ Jan. 29, 1769.

ence of temper in different persons, cried out a good many years ago, in the true spirit of poetry, "How much one man differs from another!" This does not seem a very sublime exclamation in English, but I remember we were taught to admire it in the original.

My dear friend, I am obliged to you for your invitation : but being long accustomed to retirement, which I was always fond of, I am now more than ever unwilling to revisit those noisy and crowded scenes, which I never loved, and which I now abhor. I remember you with all the friendship I ever professed, which is as much as I ever entertained for any man. But the strange and uncommon incidents of my life have given an entire new turn to my whole character and conduct, and rendered me incapable of receiving pleasure from the same employments and amusements of which I could readily partake in former days.

I love you and yours ; I thank you for your continued remembrance of me, and shall not cease to be their and your

Affectionate friend and servant,

W. C.

In the September of this year, he was summoned to Cambridge by a letter, stating that his brother was dangerously ill ; he found him so on his arrival, but after ten days left him so far restored, as to ride many miles without fatigue, and to have every symptom of returning health. These were fallacious symptoms. Cowper was again summoned in the ensuing February, and the case then had become desperate. "The physician," says he, writing to his cousin, Mrs. Cowper, "has little hope of his recovery, I believe I might say none at all, only being a friend, he does not formally give him over by ceasing to visit him, lest it should sink his spirits. For my own part, I have no expectation of his recovery, except by a signal interposition of Providence in answer to prayer. His case is clearly out of the reach of medicine ; but I have seen many a sickness healed, where the danger has been equally threatening, by the only physician of value. I doubt not he will have an interest in your prayers, as he has in the prayers of many. May the Lord incline his ear, and give an

answer of peace. I know it is good to be afflicted. I trust that you have found it so, and that under the teaching of God's own Spirit, we shall both be purified. It is the desire of my soul to seek a better country, where God shall wipe away all tears from the eyes of his people; and where, looking back upon the ways by which he has led us, we shall be filled with everlasting wonder, love, and praise."¹⁶

John Cowper died on the 20th of that month. The remarkable circumstances of his illness and death were related by his brother, in letters written at or about the time, and afterwards in a connected narrative.

TO THE REV. W. UNWIN.¹⁷

MY DEAR FRIEND,

March 31, 1770.

I am glad that the Lord made you a fellow-laborer with us, in praying my dear brother out of darkness into light. It was a blessed work, and when it shall be your turn to die in the Lord, and to rest from all your labors, that work shall follow you. I once entertained hopes of his recovery: from the moment when it pleased God to give him light in his soul, there was for four days such a visible amendment in his body as surprised us all. Dr. Glinn himself was puzzled, and began to think that all his threatening conjectures would fail of their accomplishment. I am well satisfied, that it was thus ordered, not for his own sake, but for the sake of us who had been so deeply concerned for his spiritual welfare, that he might be able to give such evident proof of the work of God upon his soul as should leave no doubt behind it. As to his friends at Cambridge, they knew nothing of the matter. He never spoke of these things but to myself, nor to me when others were within hearing, except that he sometimes would speak in the presence of the nurse. He knew well to make the distinction between those who could understand him and

¹⁶ March 5, 1770.¹⁷ This letter in Hayley is addressed to Mr. Newton; but the original is in my hands: it is the earliest in Mr. Unwin's collection. None of the letters to Olney which are mentioned in it seem to have been preserved.

those who could not ; and that he was not in circumstances to maintain such a controversy as a declaration of his new views and sentiments would have exposed him to. Just after his death, I spoke of this change to a dear friend of his, a fellow of the college, who had attended him through all his sickness with assiduity and tenderness. But he did not understand me.

I now proceed to mention such particulars as I can recollect, and which I had not an opportunity to insert in my letters to Olney ; for I left Cambridge suddenly, and sooner than I expected. He was deeply impressed with a sense of the difficulties he should have to encounter, if it should please God to raise him again. He saw the necessity of being faithful, and the opposition he should expose himself to by being so. Under the weight of these thoughts, he one day broke out in the following prayer, when only myself was with him : “ O Lord, thou art light ; and in thee is no darkness at all. Thou art the fountain of all wisdom, and it is essential to thee to be good and gracious. I am a child, O Lord ; teach me how I should conduct myself ! Give me the wisdom of the serpent, with the harmlessness of the dove ! Bless the souls thou hast committed to the care of thy helpless, miserable creature, who has no wisdom or knowledge of his own, and make me faithful to them for thy mercy’s sake ! ” Another time he said, “ How wonderful it is that God should look upon man ; and how much more wonderful that he should look upon such a worm as I am ! Yet he does look upon me, and takes the exactest notice of all my sufferings. He is present, and I see him, (I mean by faith ;) and he stretches out his arms towards me ” —and he then stretched out his own — “ and he says, Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest ! ” He smiled and wept when he spoke these words. When he expressed himself upon these subjects, there was a weight and a dignity in his manner such as I never saw before. He spoke with the greatest deliberation, making a pause at the end of every sentence ; and there was something in his air and in the tone of his voice inexpressibly solemn, unlike himself, unlike what I had ever seen in another.

This hath God wrought. I have praised him for his marvellous act, and have felt a joy of heart upon the subject of my brother's death, such as I never felt but in my own conversion. He is now before the throne; and yet a little while, and we shall meet never more to be divided.

Yours, my very dear friend, with my affectionate respects to yourself, and yours,
W. C.

Postscript. A day or two before his death he grew so weak and was so very ill, that he required continual attendance, so that he had neither strength nor opportunity to say much to me. Only the day before, he said he had had a sleepless, but a composed and quiet night. I asked him if he had been able to collect his thoughts. He replied: "All night long I have endeavored to think upon God and to continue in prayer. I had great peace and comfort; and what comfort I had came in that way." When I saw him the next morning at seven o'clock, he was dying, fast asleep, and exempted, in all appearance, from the sense of those pangs which accompany dissolution. I shall be glad to hear from you, my dear friend, when you can find time to write and are so inclined. The death of my beloved brother teems with many useful lessons. May God seal the instruction upon our hearts!

To Mrs. Cowper he says, "You judge rightly of the manner in which I have been affected by the Lord's late dispensation towards my brother. I found in it cause of sorrow that I had lost so near a relation, and one so deservedly dear to me, and that he left me just when our sentiments upon the most interesting subject became the same; but much more cause of joy that it pleased God to give me clear and evident proof that he had changed his heart, and adopted him into the number of his children. For this I hold myself peculiarly bound to thank him, because he might have done all that he was pleased to do for him, and yet have afforded him neither strength nor opportunity to declare it. I doubt not that He enlightens the understandings, and works a gracious change in the

hearts of many in their last moments, whose surrounding friends are not made acquainted with it.

"He told me that, from the time he was first ordained, he began to be dissatisfied with his religious opinions, and to suspect that there were greater things concealed in the Bible than were generally believed, or allowed, to be there. From the time when I first visited him, after my release from St. Alban's, he began to read upon the subject. It was at that time I informed him of the views of divine truth which I had received in that school of affliction. He laid what I said to heart, and began to furnish himself with the best writers upon the controverted points, whose works he read with great diligence and attention, comparing them all the while with the Scripture. None ever truly and ingeniously sought the truth, but they found it. A spirit of earnest inquiry is the gift of God, who never says to any, Seek ye my face in vain. Accordingly, about ten days before his death, it pleased the Lord to dispel all his doubts, and to reveal in his heart the knowledge of the Savior, and to give him firm and unshaken peace in the belief of his ability and willingness to save. As to the affair of the fortune-teller, he never mentioned it to me, nor was there any such paper found as you mention. I looked over all his papers before I left the place, and had there been such a one, must have discovered it. I have heard the report from other quarters, but no other particulars than that the woman foretold him when he should die. I suppose there may be some truth in the matter; but whatever he might think of it before his knowledge of the truth, and however extraordinary her predictions might really be, I am satisfied that he had then received far other views of the wisdom and majesty of God, than to suppose that he would intrust his secret counsels to a vagrant who did not mean, I suppose, to be understood to have received her intelligence from the Fountain of Light, but thought herself sufficiently honored by any who would give her credit for a secret intercourse of this kind with the Prince of Darkness."

The narrative, "faithfully transcribed from the original manuscript," was published after Cowper's death by

Mr. Newton,¹⁸ and is here inserted in its appropriate place.

¹⁸ It is a small pamphlet of thirty-six pages. Its full title is "ADELPHI. A Sketch of the Character and an Account of the last Illness of the late Rev. John Cowper, A. M. Fellow of Beunet College, Cambridge, who finished his Course with Joy, 20 March, 1770. Written by his brother, the late William Cowper, Esq. of the Inner Temple, Author of the Task, &c. Faithfully transcribed from his original Manuscript by John Newton, Rector of St. Mary Woolnoth, and St. Mary Woolchurch. 1802.

*Tu supplicanti protinus admoves
Aurem, benignus; pro lacrimis mihi
Risum reduces, pro dolore
Lætitiamque alacremque plensum.*

Buchanan, p. 30."

In his prefatory Advertisement, Mr. Newton says, "The Editor's motives, which induce him to publish the following narrative, are chiefly two.

"1. That so striking a display of the power and mercy of God may be more generally known, to the praise and glory of his grace, and the instruction and comfort of his people.

"2. The boasted spirit of refinement, the stress laid upon unassisted human reason, and the consequent skepticism to which they lead, and which so strongly mark the character of the present times, are not now confined merely to the dupes of infidelity; but many persons are under their influence, who would be much offended if we charged them with having renounced Christianity. While no theory is admitted in natural history, which is not confirmed by actual and positive experiment, religion is the only thing to which a trial by this test is refused. The very name of vital experimental religion excites contempt and scorn, and provokes resentment. The doctrines of regeneration by the powerful operation of the Holy Spirit, and the necessity of his continual agency and influence to advance the holiness and comforts of those, in whose hearts he has already begun a work of grace, are not only exploded and contradicted by many who profess a regard for the Bible, and by some who have subscribed to the articles and liturgy of our established church, but they who avow an attachment to them, are upon that account, and that account alone, considered as hypocrites or visionaries, knaves or fools.

"The Editor fears, that many unstable persons are misled and perverted by the fine words and fair speeches of those who lie in wait to deceive. But he likewise hopes, that by the blessing of God, a candid perusal of what is here published, respecting the character, sentiments, and happy death of the late Reverend John Cowper, may convince them — some of them at least — of their mistake, and break the snare in which they have been entangled."

A

SKETCH OF THE LIFE

OF THE LATE

REV. JOHN COWPER, A. M.

As soon as it had pleased God, after a long and sharp season of conviction, to visit me with the consolations of his grace, it became one of my chief concerns, that my relations might be made partakers of the same mercy. In the first letter I wrote to my brother, I took occasion to declare what God had done for my soul ; and am not conscious, that from that period down to his last illness I wilfully neglected an opportunity of engaging him, if it were possible, in conversation of a spiritual kind. When I left St. Alban's, and went to visit him at Cambridge, my heart being full of the subject, I poured it out before him without reserve ; and in all my subsequent dealings with him, so far as I was enabled, took care to show that I had received, not merely a set of notions, but a real impression of the truths of the gospel.

At first I found him ready enough to talk with me upon these subjects ; sometimes he would dispute, but always without heat or animosity, and sometimes would endeavor to reconcile the difference of our sentiments, by supposing that, at the bottom, we were both of a mind, and meant the same thing.

He was a man of a most candid and ingenuous spirit ; his temper remarkably sweet, and in his behavior to me he had always manifested an uncommon affection. His outward conduct, so far as it fell under my notice, or I could learn it by the report of others, was perfectly decent and unblamable. There was nothing vicious in any part of his practice ; but, being of a studious, thoughtful turn, he placed his chief delight in the acquisition of learning, and made such acquisitions in it, that he had but few rivals in that of a classical kind. He was critically skilled in the Latin, Greek, and Hebrew languages ; was beginning to make himself master of Syriac, and perfectly understood the French

and Italian, the latter of which he could speak fluently. These attainments, however, and many others in the literary way, he lived heartily to despise; not as useless when sanctified and employed in the service of God, but when sought after for their own sake, and with a view to the praise of men. Learned, however, as he was, he was easy and cheerful in his conversation, and entirely free from the stiffness which is generally contracted by men devoted to such pursuits.

Thus we spent about two years, conversing as occasion offered, (and we generally visited each other once or twice a week, as long as I continued at Huntingdon,) upon the leading truths of the gospel. By this time, however, he began to be more reserved; he would hear me patiently, but never reply; and this I found, upon his own confession afterward, was the effect of a resolution he had taken, in order to avoid disputes, and to secure the continuance of that peace which had always subsisted between us. When our family removed to Olney, our intercourse became less frequent. We exchanged an annual visit, and, whenever he came amongst us, he observed the same conduct, conforming to all our customs, attending family worship with us, and heard the preaching, received civilly whatever passed in conversation upon the subject, but adhered strictly to the rule he had prescribed to himself, never remarking upon or objecting to any thing he heard or saw. This, through the goodness of his natural temper, he was enabled to carry so far, that though some things unavoidably happened, which we feared would give him offence, he never took any; for it was not possible to offer him the pulpit; nor when Mr. Newton was with us once at the time of family prayer, could we ask my brother to officiate, though, being himself a minister, and one of our own family for the time, the office seemed naturally to fall into his hands.

In September, 1769, I learned by letters from Cambridge, that he was dangerously ill. I set out for that place the day after I received them, and found him as ill as I expected. He had taken cold on his return from a journey into Wales; and, lest he should be laid up at a distance from home, had pushed forward as fast as he could from Bath with a fever upon him. Soon after his arrival at Cambridge, he discharged, un-

known to himself, such a prodigious quantity of blood, that the physician ascribed it only to the strength of his constitution that he was still alive ; and assured me, that if the discharge should be repeated, he must inevitably die upon the spot. In this state of imminent danger, he seemed to have no more concern about his spiritual interests than when in perfect health. His couch was strewed with volumes of plays, to which he had frequent recourse for amusement. I learned indeed afterwards, that even at this time the thoughts of God and eternity would often force themselves upon his mind ; but not apprehending his life to be in danger, and trusting in the morality of his past conduct, he found it no difficult matter to thrust them out again.

As it pleased God that he had no relapse, he presently began to recover strength, and in ten days' time I left him so far restored, that he could ride many miles without fatigue, and had every symptom of returning health. It is probable, however, that, though his recovery seemed perfect, this illness was the means which God had appointed to bring down his strength in the midst of his journey, and to hasten on the malady which proved his last.

On the 16th of February, 1770, I was again summoned to attend him, by letters which represented him as so ill, that the physician entertained but little hopes of his recovery. I found him afflicted with the asthma and dropsy, supposed to be the effect of an imposthume in his liver. He was, however, cheerful when I first arrived, expressed great joy at seeing me, thought himself much better than he had been, and seemed to flatter himself with hopes that he should be well again. My situation at this time was truly distressful. I learned from the physician, that, in this instance as in the last, he was in much greater danger than he suspected. He did not seem to lay his illness at all to heart, nor could I find by his conversation that he had one serious thought. As often as a suitable occasion offered, when we were free from company and interruption, I endeavored to give a spiritual turn to the discourse ; and the day after my arrival, asked his permission to pray with him, to which he readily consented. I renewed my attempts in this way as often as I could, though without any apparent

success ; still he seemed as careless and unconcerned as ever ; yet I could not but consider his willingness in this instance as a token for good, and observed with pleasure ; that though at other times he discovered no mark of seriousness, yet when I spoke to him of the Lord's dealings with myself, he received what I said with affection, would press my hand, and look kindly at me, and seemed to love me the better for it.

On the 21st of the same month, he had a violent fit of the asthma, which seized him when he rose, about an hour before noon, and lasted all the day. His agony was dreadful. Having never seen any person afflicted in the same way, I could not help fearing that he would be suffocated ; nor was the physician himself without fears of the same kind. This day the Lord was very present with me, and enabled me, as I sat by the poor sufferer's side, to wrestle for a blessing upon him. I observed to him, that though it had pleased God to visit him with great afflictions, yet mercy was mingled with the dispensation. I said, " You have many friends, who love you, and are willing to do all they can to serve you ; and so perhaps have others in the like circumstances ; but it is not the lot of every sick man, how much soever he may be beloved, to have a friend that can pray for him." He replied, " That is true, and I hope God will have mercy upon me." His love for me from this time became very remarkable ; there was a tenderness in it more than was merely natural ; and he generally expressed it by calling for blessings upon me in the most affectionate terms, and with a look and manner not to be described.

At night, when he was quite worn out with the fatigue of laboring for breath, and could get no rest, his asthma still continuing, he turned to me, and said, with a melancholy air, " Brother, I seem to be marked out for misery ; you know some people are so." That moment I felt my heart enlarged, and such a persuasion of the love of God towards him was wrought in my soul, that I replied with confidence, and as if I had authority given me to say it, " But that is not your case ; you are marked out for mercy."

Through the whole of this most painful dispensation, he

was blest with a degree of patience and resignation to the will of God, not always seen in the behavior of established Christians under sufferings so great as his. I never heard a murmuring word escape him ; on the contrary, he would often say, when his pains were most acute, " I only wish it may please God to enable me to suffer without complaining ; I have no right to complain." Once he said, with a loud voice, " Let thy rod and thy staff support and comfort me ; and, O that it were with me as in times past, when the candle of the Lord shone upon my tabernacle ! " One evening, when I had been expressing my hope that the Lord would show him mercy, he replied, " I hope he will ; I am sure I pretend to nothing." Many times he spoke of himself in terms of the greatest self-abasement, which I cannot now particularly remember. I thought I could discern, in these expressions, the glimpses of approaching day ; and have no doubt at present, but that the Spirit of God was gradually preparing him, in a way of true humiliation, for that bright display of gospel grace which he was soon after pleased to afford him.¹⁹

On Saturday, the 10th of March, about three in the afternoon, he suddenly burst into tears, and said with a loud cry, " O forsake me not ! " I went to his bed-side, when he grasped my hand, and presently, by his eyes and countenance, I found that he was in prayer. Then turning to me, he said, " O, brother, I am full of what I could say to you." The nurse asked him if he would have any hartshorn or lavender. He replied, " None of these things will serve my purpose." I said, " But I know what would, my dear, don't I ? " He answered, " You do, brother."

Having continued some time silent, he said, " Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth " — then after a pause, " Ay, and he is able to do it too."

I left him for about an hour, fearing lest he should fatigue himself with talking, and because my surprise and joy were so great, that I could hardly bear them. When I returned, he threw his arms about my neck, and leaning his head

¹⁹ There is a beautiful illustration of this sudden and happy change in Mr. Cowper's poem entitled *Hope*.

" As when a felon, whom his country's laws," &c.

against mine, he said — “ Brother, if I live, you and I shall be more like one another than we have been. But, whether I live or live not, all is well, and will be so ; I know it will ; I have felt that which I never felt before, and am sure that God has visited me with this sickness, to teach me what I was too proud to learn in health. I never had satisfaction till now. The doctrines I had been used to, referred me to MYSELF for the foundation of my hopes, and there I could find nothing to rest upon. The sheet-anchor of the soul was wanting. I thought you wrong, yet wished to believe as you did. I found myself unable to believe, yet always thought that I should one day be brought to do so. You suffered more than I have done before you believed these truths ; but our sufferings, though different in their kind and measure, were directed to the same end. I hope he has taught me that which he teaches none but his own. I hope so. These things were foolishness to me once, but now I have a firm foundation, and am satisfied.”

In the evening, when I went to bid him good night, he looked steadfastly in my face, and, with great solemnity in his air and manner, taking me by the hand, resumed the discourse in these very words : — “ As empty, and yet full ; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things ; — I see the rock upon which I once split, and I see the Rock of my salvation. I have peace in myself ; and, if I live, I hope it will be that I may be made a messenger of peace to others. I have learned *that* in a moment which I could not have learned by reading many books for many years. I have often studied these points, and studied them with great attention, but was blinded by prejudice ; and, unless He who alone is worthy to unloose the seals, had opened the book to me, I had been blinded still. Now they appear so plain, that, though I am convinced no comment could ever have made me understand them, I wonder I did not see them before. Yet great as my doubts and difficulties were, they have only served to pave the way ; and, being solved, they make it plainer. The light I have received comes late : but it is a comfort to me that I never made the gospel-truths a subject of ridicule. Though I dissented from

the persuasion and the ways of God's people, I ever thought them respectable, and therefore not proper to be made a jest of. The evil I suffer is the consequence of my descent from the corrupt original stock, and of my own personal transgressions ; the good I enjoy comes to me as the overflowing of His bounty ; but the crown of all his mercies is this, that he has given me a Savior, and not only the Savior of mankind, brother, but *my* Savior."

"I should delight to see the people at Olney, but am not worthy to appear amongst them." He wept at speaking these words, and repeated them with emphasis — "I should rejoice in an hour's conversation with Mr. Newton, and, if I live, shall have much discourse with him upon these subjects, but am so weak in body, that at present I could not bear it."

At the same time, he gave me to understand, that he had been five years inquiring after the truth, that is, from the time of my first visit to him after I left St. Alban's; and that, from the very day of his ordination, which was ten years ago, he had been dissatisfied with his own views of the gospel, and sensible of their defect and obscurity ; that he had always had a sense of the importance of the ministerial charge, and had used to consider himself accountable for his doctrine no less than his practice ; that he could appeal to the Lord for his sincerity in all that time, and had never wilfully erred, but always been desirous of coming to the knowledge of the truth. He added, that the moment when he sent forth that cry,²⁰ was the moment when light was darted into his soul ; that he had thought much about these things in the course of his illness, but never till that instant was able to understand them.

It was remarkable, that from the very instant when he was first enlightened, he was also wonderfully strengthened in body, so that from the 10th to the 14th of March we all entertained hopes of his recovery. He was himself very sanguine in his expectations of it, but frequently said, that his desire of recovery extended no farther than his hope of usefulness ; adding, "Unless I may live to be an instrument of good to others, it were better for me to die now."

²⁰ On the 10th of March : *vide supra*, p. 168.

As his assurance was clear and unshaken, so he was very sensible of the goodness of the Lord to him in that respect. On the day when his eyes were opened, he turned to me, and in a low voice said, "What a mercy it is to a man in my condition to *know* his acceptance! I am completely satisfied of mine." On another occasion, speaking to the same purpose, he said, "This bed would be a bed of misery, and it is so: — but it is likewise a bed of joy and a bed of discipline. Was I to die this night, I know I should be happy. This assurance, I hope, is quite consistent with the word of God. It is built upon a sense of my own utter insufficiency, and the all-sufficiency of Christ." At the same time, he said, "Brother, I have been building my glory upon a sandy foundation; I have labored night and day to perfect myself in things of no profit; I have sacrificed my health to these pursuits, and am now suffering the consequences of my misspent labor. But how contemptible do the writers I once highly valued now appear to me! 'Yea, doubtless, I count all things loss and dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.' I must now go to a new school. I have many things to learn. I succeeded in my former pursuits. I wanted to be highly applauded; and I was so. I was flattered up to the height of my wishes: now I must learn a new lesson."

On the evening of the thirteenth, he said, "What comfort have I in this bed, miserable as I seem to be! Brother, I love to look at you. I see now, who was right, and who was mistaken. But it seems wonderful, that such a dispensation should be necessary to enforce what seems so very plain. I wish myself at Olney; you have a good river there, better than all the rivers of Damascus. What a scene is passing before me! Ideas upon these subjects crowd upon me faster than I can give them utterance. How plain do many texts appear, to which, after consulting all the commentators, I could hardly affix a meaning. Now I have their true meaning without any comment at all. There is but one key to the New Testament; there is but one interpreter. I cannot describe to you, nor shall ever be able to describe, what I felt in the moment when it was given to

me. May I make a good use of it ! How I shudder when I think of the danger I have just escaped ! I had made up my mind upon these subjects, and was determined to hazard all upon the justness of my own opinions."

Speaking of his illness, he said he had been followed night and day, from the very beginning of it, with this text, *I shall not die, but live and declare the works of the Lord.* This notice was fulfilled to him, though not in such a sense as my desires of his recovery prompted me to put upon it.

His remarkable amendment soon appeared to be no more than a present supply of strength and spirits, that he might be able to speak of the better life which God had given him, which was no sooner done than he relapsed as suddenly as he had revived. About this time he formed the purpose of receiving the sacrament, induced to it principally by a desire of setting his seal to the truth, in presence of those who were strangers to the change which had taken place in his sentiments. It must have been administered to him by the master of the college, to whom he designed to have made this short declaration : " If I die, I die in the belief of the doctrines of the reformation, and of the church of England as it was at the time of the reformation." But his strength declining apace, and his pains becoming more severe, he could never find a proper opportunity of doing it. His experience was rather peace than joy, — if a distinction may be made between joy and that heart-felt peace which he often spoke of in the most comfortable terms, and which he expressed by a heavenly smile upon his countenance under the bitterest bodily distress. His words upon this subject once were these — " How wonderful is it, that God should look upon man, especially that he should look upon *me* ! Yet he sees me and takes notice of all that I suffer. I see him, too: he is present before me, and I hear him say, Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." Mat. xi. 28. On the fourteenth, in the afternoon, I perceived that the strength and spirits which had been afforded him, were suddenly withdrawn, so that by the next day his mind became weak, and his speech roving and faltering. But still, at intervals, he was enabled to speak of divine things with great force and

clearness. On the evening of the fifteenth, he said, "There is more joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, than over ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance. That text has been sadly misunderstood by me, as well as by others. Where is that just person to be found? Alas, what must have become of me, if I had died this day sennight? What should I have had to plead? My own righteousness? *That* would have been of great service to me, to be sure! Well, whither next? Why, to the mountains to fall upon us, and to the hills to cover us! I am not duly thankful for the mercy I have received. Perhaps I may ascribe some part of my insensibility to my great weakness of body. I hope, at least, that if I was better in health, it would be better with me in these respects also."

The next day, perceiving that his understanding began to suffer by the extreme weakness of his body, he said, "I have been vain of my understanding and of my acquisitions in this place; and now God has made me little better than an idiot, as much as to say, 'Now be proud if you can.' Well, while I have any senses left, my thoughts will be poured out in the praise of God. I have an interest in Christ, in his blood and sufferings, and my sins are forgiven me. Have I not cause to praise him? When my understanding fails me quite, as I think it will soon, then He will pity my weakness."

Though the Lord intended that his warfare should be short, yet a warfare he was to have, and to be exposed to a measure of conflict with his own corruptions. His pain being extreme, his powers of recollection much impaired, and the Comforter withholding for a season his sensible support, he was betrayed into a fretfulness and impatience of spirit which had never been permitted to show itself before. This appearance alarmed me; and having an opportunity afforded me by every body's absence, I said to him, "You were happier last Saturday than you are to-day. Are you entirely destitute of the consolations you then spoke of? And do you not sometimes feel comfort flowing into your heart from a sense of your acceptance with God?" He replied, "Sometimes I do, but sometimes I am left to desperation." The same day, in the evening, he said, "Brother, I believe you are often uneasy, lest what lately

passed should come to nothing." I replied by asking him, whether, when he found his patience and his temper fail, he endeavored to pray for power against his corruptions. He answered, "Yes, a thousand times in a day. But I see myself odiously vile and wicked. If I die in this illness, I beg you will place no other inscription over me than such as may just mention my name, and the parish where I was minister; for that I ever had a being, and what sort of a being I had, cannot be too soon forgot. I was just beginning to be a deist, and had long desired to be so; and I will own to you, what I never confessed before, that my function and the duties of it were a weariness to me which I could not bear. Yet, wretched creature and beast as I was, I was esteemed religious, though I lived without God in the world." About this time, I reminded him of the account of Janeway, which he once read at my desire. He said he had laughed at it in his own mind, and accounted it mere madness and folly: "Yet, base as I am," said he, "I have no doubt now but God has accepted me also, and forgiven me all my sins."

I then asked him what he thought of my narrative. He replied, "I thought it strange, and ascribed much of it to the state which you had been in. When I came to visit you in London, and found you in that deep distress, I would have given the universe to have administered some comfort to you. You may remember that I tried every method of doing it. When I found that all my attempts were vain, I was shocked to the greatest degree. I began to consider your sufferings as a judgment upon you, and my inability to alleviate them as a judgment upon myself. When Mr. Madan came, he succeeded in a moment. This surprised me; but it does not surprise me now. He had the key to your heart, which I had not. That which filled me with disgust against my office as a minister was, the same ill success which attended me in my own parish. There I endeavored to soothe the afflicted, and to reform the unruly by warning and reproof; but all that I could say in either case was spoken to the wind, and attended with no effect."

There is that in the nature of salvation by grace, when it is truly and experimentally known, which prompts every

person to think himself the most extraordinary instance of its power. Accordingly, my brother insisted upon the precedence in this respect, and, upon comparing his case with mine, would by no means allow my deliverance to have been so wonderful as his own. He observed, that, "from the beginning, both his manner of life and his connections had been such as had a natural tendency to blind his eyes, and to confirm and rivet his prejudices against the truth. Blameless in his outward conduct, and having no open immorality to charge himself with, his acquaintance had been with men of the same stamp, who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised the doctrines of the cross. Such were all who from his earliest days he had been used to propose to himself as patterns for his imitation." Not to go further back, such was the clergyman under whom he received the first rudiments of his education; such was the schoolmaster under whom he was prepared for the university, and such were all the most admired characters there, with whom he was most ambitious of being connected. He lamented the dark and Christless condition of the place, where learning and morality were all in all, and where, if a man was possessed of these qualifications, he neither doubted himself, nor did any body else question the safety of his state. He concluded, therefore, that to show the fallacy of such appearances, and to root out the prejudices which long familiarity with them had fastened upon his mind, required a more than ordinary exertion of divine power, and that the grace of God was more clearly manifested in such a work, than in the conversion of one like me, who had no outside righteousness to boast of, and who, if I was ignorant of the truth, was not, however, so desperately prejudiced against it."

His thoughts, I suppose, had been led to this subject, when, one afternoon, while I was writing by the fireside, he thus addressed himself to the nurse, who sat at his bolster — "Nurse, I have lived three and thirty years, and I will tell you how I have spent them. When I was a boy, they taught me Latin; and because I was the son of a gentleman, they taught me Greek. These I learned under a sort of private tutor; at the age of fourteen, or thereabouts, they sent me to a public school, where I learned more

Latin and Greek, and, last of all, to this place, where I have been learning more Latin and Greek still. Now has not this been a blessed life, and much to the glory of God?" Then, directing his speech to me, he said, "Brother, I was going to say I was born in such a year, but I correct myself; I would rather say, in such a year I came into the world. You know when I was born."

As long as he expected to recover, the souls committed to his care were much upon his mind. One day, when none were present but myself, he prayed thus: "O Lord, thou art good; goodness is thy very essence, and thou art the fountain of wisdom. I am a poor worm, weak and foolish as a child. Thou hast intrusted many souls unto me; and I have not been able to teach them, because I knew thee not myself. Grant me ability, O Lord, for I can do nothing without thee, and give me grace to be faithful."

In a time of severe and continual pain he smiled in my face, and said, "Brother, I am as happy as a king." And the day before he died, when I asked him what sort of a night he had had, he replied, "A sad night, not a wink of sleep." I said, "Perhaps, though, your mind has been composed, and you have been enabled to pray?" "Yes," said he, "I have endeavored to spend the hours in the thoughts of God and prayer; I have been much comforted, and all the comfort I got came to me in this way."

The next morning, I was called up to be witness of his last moments. I found him in a deep sleep, lying perfectly still, and seemingly free from pain. I staid with him till they pressed me to quit the room, and in about five minutes after I had left him he died;—sooner indeed than I expected, though for some days there had been no hopes of his recovery. His death at that time was rather extraordinary; at least I thought it so; for, when I took leave of him the night before, he did not seem worse or weaker than he had been, and, for aught that appeared, might have lasted many days; but the Lord, in whose sight the death of his saints is precious, cut short his sufferings, and gave him a speedy and peaceful departure.

He died at seven in the morning, on the 20th of March, 1770.

CHAPTER VIII.

COWPER AT OLNEY. RETURN OF HIS DISORDER. PARTIAL
RECOVERY. MR. NEWTON REMOVES TO LONDON.

THE course of life into which Cowper had been led at Olney, tended to alienate him from the friends whom he loved best. He had dropped his correspondence with Lady Hesketh before she left England; and it seems as if that with Hill would have been dropped also, if Hill had not managed his pecuniary concerns, and clung to him with an affection which was not to be shaken from its hold. It was not till seven weeks after his brother's death that Cowper wrote to him,¹ and then in reply to a letter which, as it touched upon matters of business, required an answer. The account which he acknowledged appears to have been of an uncomfortable kind; for after touching upon what his condition and his expectations might have been, Cowper says, "He to whom I have surrendered myself and all my concerns hath otherwise appointed; and let His will be done! He gives me much which he withholds from others; and if he was pleased to withhold all that makes an outward difference between me and the poor mendicant in the street, it would still become me to say, His will be done!"

In the course of the autumn, this true friend again invited him to London. The answer was not cold, but it was chilling.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

DEAR JOE,

Sept. 25, 1770.

I have not done conversing with terrestrial objects, though I should be happy were I able to hold more continual converse with a Friend above the skies. He has my heart; but He allows a corner in it for all who show me kindness, and therefore one for you. The storm of sixty-three made a wreck of the friendships I had contracted in the course of many years, yours excepted, which has survived the tempest.

¹ May 8, 1770.

I thank you for your repeated invitation. Singular thanks are due to you for so *singular* an instance of your regard. I could not leave Olney, unless in a case of absolute necessity, without much inconvenience to myself and others.

W. C.

In the ensuing summer Hill wrote to tell him of his marriage. Cowper replied thus:—

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

DEAR JOE,

Aug. 27, 1771.

I take a friend's share in all your concerns, so far as they come to my knowledge, and consequently did not receive the news of your marriage with indifference. I wish you and your bride all the happiness that belongs to the state; and the still greater felicity of that state which marriage is only a type of. All those connections shall be dissolved; but there is an indissoluble bond between Christ and his church, the subject of derision to an unthinking world, but the glory and happiness of all his people.

I join with your mother and sisters in their joy upon the present occasion, and beg my affectionate respects to them, and to Mrs. Hill unknown.

Yours ever,

W. C.

This seems to have been followed by a silence of ten months, which was broken by an offer of assistance from Hill. The letters in which Cowper declines it, accepts it afterwards in the spirit in which it was sent, and declines a third invitation from his unwearied friend, show the state of his feelings during what has preposterously been called the happy portion of his life.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

June 27, 1772.

I only write to return you thanks for your kind offer:—*Agnosco veteris vestigia flammæ*. But I will endeavor to go on without troubling you. Excuse an expression that dishonors your friendship; I should rather say it would

be a trouble to myself, and I know you will be generous enough to give me credit for the assertion. I had rather want many things, — any thing, indeed, that this world could afford me, — than abuse the affection of a friend. I suppose you are sometimes troubled upon my account. But you need not. I have no doubt it will be seen, when my days are closed, that I served a Master who would not suffer me to want any thing that was good for me. He said to Jacob, "I will surely do thee good;" and this he said, not for his sake only, but for ours also, if we trust in Him. This thought relieves me from the greatest part of the distress I should else suffer in my present circumstances, and enables me to sit down peacefully upon the wreck of my fortune.

Yours ever, my dear friend,

W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

July 2, 1772.

My obligations to you sit easy upon me, because I am sure you confer them in the spirit of a friend. 'Tis pleasant to some minds to confer obligations, and it is not unpleasant to others to be properly sensible of them. I hope I have this pleasure, — and can, with a true sense of your kindness, subscribe myself,

Yours,

W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

Nov. 5, 1772.

Believe me, my dear friend, truly sensible of your invitation, though I do not accept it. My peace of mind is of so delicate a constitution, that the air of London will not agree with it. You have my prayers — the only return I can make you for your many acts of still-continued friendship.

If you should smile, or even laugh at my conclusion, and I were near enough to see it, I should not be angry, though I should be grieved. It is not long since I should have laughed at such a recompense myself. But glory be to the name of Jesus, those days are past, and, I trust, never to return! I am yours, and Mrs. Hill's,

with much sincerity,

W. C.

These letters may have been written in a frame of "settled tranquillity and peace," but it was a tranquillity that had rendered his feelings of friendship torpid; and if this was "the only sunshine he ever enjoyed through the cloudy day of his afflicted life," it was not the sunshine of a serene sky.

The vicarage of Olney was in the Earl of Dartmouth's gift, a nobleman of whom Richardson is reported to have said, when asked if he knew an original answerable to his portrait of Sir Charles Grandison, that he might apply it to *him* if he were not a Methodist.² The earl had given this living to Moses Brown, probably upon the recommendation of Hervey, the author of the *Meditations*, under whose patronage Brown, who had been a pen-cutter by trade, and a dramatist, had taken orders. Moses Brown was a poet, whose poems have not been fortunate enough to obtain a place in the General Collections, though better entitled to it than some which are found there. He published an edition of Izaak Walton's delightful book, being himself an angler, and, as Izaak would have added, a very honest man. His *Piscatory Eclogues* are better known by name than any of his other writings. But though thus given to poetry, and addicted to the recreation which seems to have most attractions for a meditative mind, he had not been negligent in his vocation as a fisher of men. Mr. Cecil says of him that he was "an evangelical minister, and a good man;" that "of course he had afforded wholesome instruction to the parishioners of Olney, and had been the instrument of a sound conversion in many of them;" that he had a numerous family, and met with considerable trials in it; that he too much resembled Eli in his indulgence of his children, and that, being under the pressure of pecuniary difficulties, he had therefore accepted the chaplaincy of Morden College, Blackheath, while vicar of Olney. It was in consequence of Moses Brown having thus been compelled to become a non-resident incumbent, that Mr. Newton, in the year 1764, had been ordained upon the curacy of Olney.

In nominating him to this curacy, Lord Dartmouth pro-

² *Memoirs of Hannah More*, vol. iii. p. 78.

vided, as he conscientiously sought to do, for the spiritual wants of the flock; but the provision for the temporal necessities of the pastor was poor indeed. "The curacy of Olney,"³ says Mr. Newton, "is thirty pounds; surplice fees about eight; subscriptions, &c. from the people have to me sometimes been forty pounds; but I question if it would be near so much to a new comer; perhaps no more than thirty pounds, if that." He took the curacy with an understanding that he might expect the living, if it should become vacant, and the vicar was at that time more than threescore years of age. But Moses Brown was one of those men who "be so strong that they come to fourscore," and the curate of Olney would have had little indeed for the poor and needy of his parishioners, and nothing for hospitality, if he had not introduced himself to Mr. Thornton, who was known as "the common patron of every useful and pious endeavor," by sending him the narrative of his own life, which he had concluded just before the curacy had been offered him, and published in the same year. Mr. Thornton replied "in his usual manner," that is, by accompanying his letter with a valuable bank-note; and some months after, he paid Mr. Newton a visit at Olney. A closer connection being now formed between friends who employed their distinct talents in promoting the same benevolent cause, Mr. Thornton left a sum of money with Mr. Newton, to be appropriated to the defraying his necessary expenses, and relieving the poor.⁴ "Be hospitable," said Mr. Thornton, "and keep an open house for such as are worthy of an entertainment: help the poor and needy: I will stately allow you two hundred pounds a year, and readily send whatever you have occasion to draw for more." Cowper was supplied also by this excellent man with a sum for charitable distribution, Mr. Thornton having been informed how little his means for relieving the distressed was commensurate with his will.

Cowper at this time read little: he had parted with a good collection of books when his affairs in London were settled; afterwards he often regretted this; but during the

³ March 9, 1777.

⁴ Cecil's Memoirs of Mr. Newton.

first year of his residence at Olney, he seems to have had neither inclination nor leisure for reading. Mr. Unwin was settled upon a living in Essex; his sister had married a clergyman, by name Powley, and removed to a great distance, in Yorkshire. Cowper, therefore, had no other society than that of Mrs. Unwin and Mr. Newton; and he held no communication with his absent friends. He was not, however, without some intellectual employment; Mr. Newton, having formed the intention of producing a volume of hymns, persuaded him to engage in it; "a desire," he says, "of promoting the faith and comfort of sincere Christians, though the principal, was not the only motive to this undertaking. It was likewise intended as a monument to perpetuate the remembrance of an intimate and endeared friendship."

One of Cowper's biographers thinks it not improbable that Mr. Newton might have witnessed in his morbid tendency to melancholy, whereof he then discovered symptoms, some traces of the deep and extensive wound which his mind had received by his brother's death, though his efforts to conceal it were incessant;⁵ and that for this reason "he wisely engaged him in a literary undertaking, congenial with his taste, suited to his admirable talents, and perhaps more adapted to alleviate his distress than any other that could have been selected." And Mr. Hayley⁶ has been reprehended for representing it as a perilous employment, considering what Cowper's malady had been.

Yet if Cowper expressed his own state of mind in these hymns, (and who can doubt that they were written with no

⁵ Taylor's Life of Cowper, p. 102.

⁶ "It may be doubtful," he says, "if the intense zeal with which Cowper embarked in this fascinating pursuit, had not a dangerous tendency to undermine his very delicate health. Such an apprehension naturally arises from a recollection of what medical writers of great ability have said on the awful subject of mental derangement. Whenever the slightest tendency to that misfortune appears, it seems expedient to guard a tender spirit from the attractions of Piety herself. So fearfully and wonderfully are we made, that man, in all conditions, ought, perhaps, to pray that he never may be led to think of his Creator, and of his Redeemer, either too lightly or too intensely; since human misery is often seen to arise equally from an utter neglect of all spiritual concerns, and from a wild extravagance of devotion."

simulated feeling, and those with most feeling which are most passionate?) Hayley has drawn the right conclusion from the fact.

Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord?
Where is the soul-refreshing view
Of Jesus and his word?

What peaceful hours I once enjoyed!
How sweet their memory still!
But they have left an aching void
The world can never fill.⁷

Again, but in a strain that denoted a more fearful state:—

My former hopes are fled;
My terror now begins:
I feel, alas! that I am dead
In trespasses and sins.

Ah, whither shall I fly?
I hear the thunder roar;
The law proclaims destruction nigh,
And vengeance at the door!⁸

And in another, which is entitled *The Contrite Heart*:—

The Lord will happiness divine
On contrite hearts bestow:
Then tell me, gracious God, is mine
A contrite heart, or no?

I hear, but seem to hear in vain,
Insensible as steel:
If aught is felt, 'tis only pain
To find I cannot feel.

I sometimes think myself inclined
To love thee, if I could;
But often feel another mind,
Averse to all that's good.

My best desires are faint and few;
I fain would strive for more;
But when I cry, "My strength renew,"
Seem weaker than before.

⁷ Olney Coll. Book i. Hymn 3.

⁸ Ib. Book iii. Hymn 8.

Thy saints are comforted, I know,
 And love thy house of prayer ;
 I therefore go where others go,
 But find no comfort there.

O make this heart rejoice or ache ;
 Decide this doubt for me ;
 And if it be not broken, break ;
 And heal it, if it be !⁹

It is true that expressions of hope follow the two former passages which have been here adduced, and that in other parts there is a tone of cheerful devotion. In his *Welcome to the Table* he says,

If guilt and sin afford a plea,
 And may obtain a place,
 Surely the Lord will welcome me,
 And I shall see his face.¹⁰

And his hymn of *Jehovah Jesus* concludes with the triumphant ejaculation,

Salvation's sure, and must be mine.¹¹

In common cases these variations would have been nothing more than what Mr. Newton daily was told of by those persons who conversed with and consulted him as their spiritual director. But Cowper's was not a common case. His malady in its latter stage had been what is termed religious madness ; and if his recovery was not supposed by himself, and by Mr. Newton also, to have been directly miraculous, it had been occasioned or accompanied by impressions, which, though favorable in their consequences at that crisis, indicated a frame of mind to which any extraordinary degree of devotional excitement must be dangerous. The ministerial offices in which his friend engaged him were highly so ; and in composing the *Olney Hymns* he was led to brood over his own sensations in a way which rendered him peculiarly liable to be deluded by them. Whether any course of life could wholly have averted the recurrence

⁹ *Olney Coll.* Book i. Hymn 64.

¹⁰ *Ib.* Book ii. Hymn 53.

¹¹ *Ib.* Hymn 38.

of his disease may be doubtful ; but that the course into which he was led accelerated it, there is the strongest reason to conclude.

Another cause, however, has been assigned for it. It has been said that he proposed marriage to Mrs. Unwin, that the proposal was accepted and the time fixed ; that prudential considerations were then thought to preponderate against it, and that his mind was overthrown by the anxieties consequent upon such an engagement. This I believe to be utterly unfounded ; for that no such engagement was either known or suspected by Mr. Newton I am enabled to assert ; and who can suppose that it would have been concealed from him ?

It is said that from the time of his brother's death, the increasing gloom which pressed upon his spirits gave but too much ground for the most painful apprehensions. But Dr. Cotton was not consulted till it was too late. In January, 1773, it had become a case of decided insanity. He was then unwilling even to enter Mr. Newton's door ; but having one day been prevailed upon to visit him and remain one night, there he suddenly determined to stay. This was in March, and it appears that the case was not thought to require Dr. Cotton's advice till he had remained there five months, when Mr. Newton wrote thus to Mr. Thornton : ¹² " I was at St. Alban's on Monday, to consult Dr. Cotton concerning Mr. Cowper. He desired that he might, if possible, be bled ; and that the apothecary would give him an accurate account of the state of his blood, and what other observations he can make. He has been bled accordingly, and I hope we shall be able to give him every information which may be needful by to-morrow's post ; and we shall then expect soon to receive his judgment and advice. From what I told him, he seemed to think it a difficult case. It may be so according to medical rules ; but I still hope that the Great Physician will cure him, either by giving a blessing to means, or immediately by His own hand. I know not how to indulge a fear that the Lord, who has hitherto done such great things for him, and made

¹² Aug. 17, 1773.

him such a bright example of grace and submission, will suffer him to be always overwhelmed with this cloud ; or refuse to give an answer to the many prayers which are put up for him."

About a fortnight afterwards, Mr. Newton says, "Mr. Cowper has taken Dr. Cotton's medicines about twelve days. They agree well with him ; he eats better and sleeps no worse. He seems better in some respects ; has employed himself a little of late in his favorite amusement, gardening, and has pruned several of our fruit-trees, which I think he could not possibly have done when you were here. But the distress of his mind seems but little, if at all, abated. It gives me great satisfaction that he is under a course of medicine ; and I am still in good spirits about his recovery."¹³ The next communication says, "There has been little or no alteration in Mr. Cowper since my last. But the medicine evidently agrees with him. He says but little, but goes on in pruning our trees ; and we are glad to find him capable of taking any amusement, and hope for the rest in the Lord's good time."¹⁴

After another interval of three weeks, Mr. Newton says,¹⁵ "Dr. Cotton's medicine has greatly strengthened his body ; but the repeated use seemed at length to have an inconvenient effect upon his spirits. He said they made him worse, and for several days, when the hour of taking them returned, it put him in an agony. Upon his earnest and urgent entreaties, he has left them off for a season, and has been better since, — I mean more quiet and composed. We have evident proof that the Lord is with him, supporting him, and answering prayer in his behalf ; but deliverance is not yet come."

Up to this time, Cowper, though he suffered greatly in mind, had not been "troubled with thoughts" of suicide ; and that Mr. Newton considered a great mercy ; but a fearful change in this respect then took place, and at a time when both Mr. and Mrs. Newton were in a distant part of the country.¹⁶ The following extracts show the state of

¹³ Sept. 2, 1773.

¹⁴ Sept. 9.

¹⁵ Sept. 29.

¹⁶ "After what happened to dear Mr. Cowper while we were in Warwickshire, we have made it a point not to be both from home long

his mind. Mr. Newton says, "I wish I could inform you that I found dear Mr. Cowper much better when I returned; but his deliverance is yet to come; though in his case likewise there are such evident proofs of the Lord's care and goodness as encourage us still to hope for a happy issue."¹⁷ The next week's letter says, "Dear Mr. Cowper has been more restless and impatient than formerly. I believe the medicines he took, though they seemed to agree with his health, rather inflamed his complaint. I was with Dr. Cotton again on Monday, who approved of our having discontinued them. I thank God those disagreeable appearances have gone off, and he is now quiet and gentle again, though his distress is very great."¹⁸ After an interval of some six weeks, and another absence from Olney, his friend writes, "Mr. Cowper is no worse than when I left him, nor can I say that he is much better. Sometimes the Lord visits him in his sleep, so that his dreams are gracious and comfortable, and his heart drawn forth in prayer; but when he awakes his distress returns."¹⁹ This is a remarkable passage, as it seems to show that when his madness was at the height, the mind recovered its natural tone during sleep, and his dreams were sometimes sane.

In the ensuing March, "Mr. Cowper still in the depths. Sometimes I have hope that his deliverance is at hand; at others I am almost at a stand. Yet I seldom am shaken in my persuasion that the issue, in the Lord's time, will be glorious." Since the autumn, his state had become more fearful, and had required a constant watchfulness on the part of his friends, which nothing but the most devoted attachment could have induced them to undertake, or enabled them to undergo. Mrs. Unwin was his unwearied attendant at this time, day and night, equally regardless of her own health, and of the uncharitable construction of censorious and malicious tongues. The character which his madness had assumed rendered this perpetual vigilance necessary. "In the beginning of his disorder," says Mr. New-

together, without an absolute necessity, while his distress continues." Subsequent extracts show that the change occurred in October, and that in that month Mr. Newton returned home.

¹⁷ Oct. 16.

¹⁸ Oct. 23.

¹⁹ Dec. 2.

ton, "when he was more capable of conversing than he was sometimes afterwards, how often have I heard him adore and submit to the sovereignty of God, and declare, though in the most agonizing and inconceivable distress, he was so perfectly satisfied of the wisdom and rectitude of the Lord's appointments, that if he was sure of relieving himself only by stretching out his hand, he would not do it, unless he was equally sure it was agreeable to His will that he should do it. I hope I shall never have so striking a proof of the integrity of any other friend, — because I hope I never shall see any other in so dreadful a state of trial."²⁰

In the new character which his delirium had assumed, the same perfect spirit of submission was manifested. Mr. Newton says, "Even that attempt he made in October was a proof of it; for it was solely owing to the power the enemy had of impressing upon his disturbed imagination that it was the will of God, he should, after the example of Abraham, perform an expensive act of obedience, and offer not a son, but himself."²¹ This was the peculiar impression which fastened upon him at that time, and from which he never seems to have been perfectly relieved, even in his longest and best intervals. He believed that when the will of Heaven was made known to him, power to accomplish the act of obedience had at the same time been given; but having failed to use it, he had been sentenced to a state of desertion and perpetual misery, of a kind peculiar to himself. A persuasion that the opportunity had gone by, seems at this time to have withheld him from any second attempt; but such a persuasion afforded no security to his friends, and their anxiety and vigilance were unintermitted. He had sunk into a state of utter hopelessness, "an unalterable persuasion," says Mr. Greatheed, "that the Lord, after having renewed him in holiness, had doomed him to everlasting perdition. The doctrines in which he had been established directly opposed such a conclusion, and he remained still equally convinced of this *general* truth; but he supposed himself to be the only person that ever believed with the heart unto righteousness, and was,

²⁰ May 26, 1774.

²¹ May 26, 1774.

notwithstanding, excluded from salvation. In this state of mind, with a deplorable consistency, he ceased not only from attendance upon public and domestic worship, but likewise from every attempt at private prayer; apprehending that for *him* to implore mercy, would be opposing the determinate counsel of God."

Meantime the inconvenience to Mr. Newton was sorely felt, though he performed every duty of friendship to the utmost. Writing to his benefactor, Mr. Thornton,²² he says, "Though I receive no person but upon the principle you allow and encourage for the Lord's sake, and in the hope of usefulness, it gives me a little pain sometimes, that our expenses, which are chiefly enhanced by company, were so high, and especially this year, having Mr. Cowper and Mrs. Unwin with us. The charge upon their account is not so great as if Mrs. Unwin had no house of her own; yet it is considerable. But I do not see how it can be avoided. When he came to us, I had no thoughts of his staying more than one night; but he has been so attached to this house, that it would be impossible to hint at his leaving it without aggravating his distress. Now there is something in me (I hope it is not pride) which makes me quite unwilling to receive any inmates upon the footing of boarders."²³

In a subsequent letter he says, "Mr. Cowper's long stay at the vicarage in his present uncomfortable state, has been upon many accounts inconvenient and trying. His choice of being here was quite unexpected; and his continuance is unavoidable, unless he was to be removed by force. Mrs. Unwin has often tried to persuade him to return to their own house, but he cannot bear to hear of it. He sometimes begs, and weeps, and pleads to stay with such earnestness that it must be submitted to. I make myself easy by reflecting that the Lord's hand is concerned; and I am hoping weekly for his deliverance. His health is better; he works almost incessantly in the garden, and while employed is tolerably easy; but as soon as he leaves off, he is instantly swallowed up by the most gloomy apprehensions; though

²² 1774. The letter is without date.

²³ May 2, 1774.

in every thing that does not concern his own peace, he is as sensible, and discovers as quick a judgment as ever. The Lord evidently sent him to Olney, where he has been a blessing to many, a great blessing to myself. The Lord has numbered the days in which I am appointed to wait upon him in this dark valley, and He has given us such a love to him both as a believer and as a friend, that I am not weary; but, to be sure, his deliverance would be to me one of the greatest blessings my thoughts can conceive."

In the course of a fortnight after this letter was written, the first symptom of amendment was perceived. "Yesterday, as he was feeding the chickens," Mr. Newton says, — "for he is always busy if he can get out of doors, — some little incident made him smile; I am pretty sure it was the first smile that has been seen upon his face for more than sixteen months. I hope the continuance of air and exercise will, by the Lord's blessing, gradually lighten the cloud which hangs upon his mind. I have no right to complain; my mercies are many and great, my trials comparatively few; yet surely this affair, taken in all its circumstances, has been such a heavy trial to me, that had not I seen the Lord's hand in it, and had not His hand been with me likewise, I surely should have labored to shake it off before now. But when it first began, I prayed the Lord that I might not be weary. Hitherto He has helped; and however dark the path may grow, so long as it appears to me to be the path of duty, I dare not decline it."²⁴

The next letter announced that Mrs. Unwin had prevailed on Cowper to return to their own house. "She had often labored at this point in vain, and I am persuaded," says Mr. Newton, "a few days sooner it would have been impracticable. But now the Lord, who saw the weight I had upon my mind, was pleased to overrule him to go. The day before he came hither, hardly any entreaty could have induced him to enter our doors; it was a sudden turn; his determination to stay when he was here was sudden, and equally sudden was his departure. When he had once consented, he longed to be gone. A few days were neces-

sary to prepare the house for their reception ; but they left on last Monday morning. I think it was the Lord's doing, — one of the many proofs we have had in the course of this affliction, that with Him nothing is impossible. I can see much of His wisdom and goodness in sending him under my roof ; and now I see His goodness in removing him. Upon the whole, I have not been weary of my cross. Besides the submission I owe to the Lord, I think I can hardly do or suffer too much for such a friend ; yet sometimes my heart has been impatient and rebellious. But I see the Lord's time is the best. The rest must be waited for, and I have hopes we shall not wait very long. He evidently grows better, though the main stress of his malady still continues. He has been hitherto almost exactly treading over again the dreary path he formerly trod at St. Alban's. Some weeks before his deliverance there, he began to recover his attention, which had long been absorbed and swallowed up in the depths of despair, so that he could amuse himself a little with other things. Into this state the Lord seems now to have brought him ; so that, though he seems to think himself lost to hope, he can continually employ himself in gardening, and upon that subject will talk as freely as formerly, though he seldom notices other conversation ; and we can perceive almost daily, that his attention to things about him increases. I really have a warm hope that his deliverance is approaching."²⁵

A decisive symptom of amendment had previously shown itself. His mind, though possessed by its fatal delusion, had recovered in some degree its activity, and in some of his most melancholy moments he used to compose lines descriptive of his own unhappy state. Two of these lines were remembered by a young poet²⁶ of St. John's, who sometimes went from Cambridge to visit Mr. Newton while Cowper was residing with him ; and Mr. George Dyer has

²⁵ May 26.

²⁶ Mr. Brian Bury Collins, "one of my own early friends," says Mr. Dyer, "who touched the true lyric strings ; but leaving college, he abandoned poetry for pursuits which more interested him ; and now both as to poetry and preaching, — *lingua silet*." — Hist. of Cambridge, vol. ii. p. 265.

preserved them in his History of Cambridge,²⁷ with a poet's feeling; "not recollecting," he says, "that they are any where introduced, and conceiving them to be more descriptive of the circumstances of Mr. Cowper's situation, than any with which we have met in his writings."

*Cæsus amor meus est, et nostro crimine : cujus,
Ah! cujus posthinc potero latitare sub alis?*

My love is slain, and by my crime is slain;
Ah! now beneath whose wings shall I repose?

G. D.

The fatal impression remained fixed in his mind, while in other respects it gradually regained its natural tone. He was incapable of receiving pleasure either from company or books; but he continued to employ himself in gardening, and understanding his own case well enough to perceive that any thing which would engage his attention without fatiguing it, must be salutary, he amused himself with some leverets; they grew up under his care, and continued to interest him nearly twelve years, when the last survivor died quietly of mere old age. He has immortalized them in Latin and in English, in verse and in prose; they have been represented in prints, and cut on seals; and his account of them, which, in all editions of his poems, is now appended to their epitaphs, contains more observations than had ever before been contributed toward the natural history of this inoffensive race. He found in them as much difference of temper and character as is observable in all domestic animals, and in men themselves; and this might have been expected. The most remarkable fact which he noticed is, that they were never infested by any vermin; but it should seem more probable that this should have been an accidental consequence of their mode of life, than that the species should

²⁷ Supplement to the History of Cambridge, p. 111. I will not deny myself the pleasure of observing that this passage, which I had passed over without noting it, ten years ago, (not having then any particular interest in the subject,) was recently pointed out to me by Mr. Wordsworth, in the curious and characteristic work of our old friend;—a person, of whom if I were ever to think without kindness, or to speak without affection and respect, I should be ashamed of myself. He is now blind, and in his eighty-first year.

be exempt from an annoyance, to which, as far as we know, all other animals are subject, not birds and beasts only, but fish, and even insects.

To one of these hares that had never seen a spaniel, Cowper introduced a spaniel that had never seen a hare; and because the one discovered no token of fear and the other no symptom of hostility, he inferred that there is no natural antipathy between dog and hare — a fallacious inference, for the dog in its wild, which is its natural state, is a beast of prey. One of them was happier in human society than when shut up with his natural companions. Cowper twice nursed this creature in sickness, and by constant care and trying him with a variety of herbs, restored him to perfect health. "No creature," he says, "could be more grateful than my patient after his recovery — a sentiment which he most significantly expressed by licking my hand, first the back of it, then the palm, then every finger separately, then between all the fingers, as if anxious to leave no part of it unsaluted; a ceremony which he never performed but once again, upon a similar occasion." It is very remarkable that this peculiar expression of attachment should only have been shown twice, and each time for the same peculiar reason.

More than two years elapsed after his return to his own house, before he renewed the communication with any of his absent friends. The silence seems then to have been broken by a letter from Mr. Hill, informing him of his uncle Ashley's recovery from a serious illness, and offering, as appears by the answer, to supply some of his wishes, as well as his wants. A gleam of cheerfulness appears in Cowper's reply.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

DEAR FRIEND,

Nov. 12, 1776.

One to whom fish is so welcome as it is to me, can have no great occasion to distinguish the sorts. In general, therefore, whatever fish are likely to think a jaunt into the country agreeable, will be sure to find me ready to receive them — butts, plaice, flounder, or any other.

Having suffered so much by nervous fevers myself, I know how to congratulate Ashley upon his recovery. Other

distempers only batter the walls ; but *they* creep silently into the citadel, and put the garrison to the sword.

You perceive I have not made a squeamish use of your obliging offer. The remembrance of past years, and of the sentiments formerly exchanged in our evening walks, convinces me still that an unreserved acceptance of what is graciously offered, is the handsomest way of dealing with one of your character.

Believe me yours,

W. C.

As to the frequency, which you leave to my choice, too, you have no need to exceed the number of your former remittances.

After an interval of some five months, Cowper thanks his old friend²⁸ for a "turbot, a lobster, and Captain Brydone ; a gentleman," he says, "who relates his travels so agreeably that he deserves always to travel with an agreeable companion." By this time Cowper's love of literature had revived. "I have been reading Gray's works," he says, "and think him the only poet since Shakspeare entitled to the character of sublime. Perhaps you will remember that I once had a different opinion of him. I was prejudiced. He did not belong to our Thursday society, and was an Eton man, which lowered him prodigiously in our esteem. I once thought Swift's letters the best that could be written ; but I like Gray's better. His humor, or his wit, or whatever it is to be called, is never ill natured or offensive ; and yet, I think, equally poignant with the dean's."

Hill encouraged this renovation of his former taste for intellectual amusement, entered upon literary subjects in his next letter, and offered to send him the Abbé Raynal's History. Cowper replies,²⁹ "We differ not much in our opinion of Mr. Gray. When I wrote last, I was in the middle of the book. His later Epistles, I think, are worth little, *as such*, but might be turned to excellent account by a young student of taste and judgment. As to Mr. West's

²⁸ April 20, 1777.

²⁹ May 25, 1777.

Letters, I think I could easily bring your opinion of them to square with mine. They are elegant and sensible, but have nothing in them that is characteristic, or that discriminates them from the letters of any other young man of taste and learning. As to the book you mention, I am in doubt whether to read it or not. I should like the philosophical part of it; but the political, which, I suppose, is a detail of intrigues carried on by the Company and their servants, a history of rising and falling nabobs, I should have no appetite to at all. I will not, therefore, give you the trouble of sending it at present."

Hill then proposed to send him the *South Sea Voyages*, but Lord Dartmouth, who had recently³⁰ visited Olney, had furnished Cowper with both Cook and Forster's. "'Tis well," he said, "for the poor natives of those distant countries that our national expenses cannot be supplied by cargoes of yams and bananas. Curiosity, therefore, being once satisfied, they may possibly be permitted for the future to enjoy their riches of this kind in peace."³¹ But he asked his friend, if he could procure them, to send him at his leisure, Baker on the Microscope, and Vincent Bourne's Poems.

So little had Cowper as yet recovered his inclination for letter-writing, that he to whom every trifling circumstance afterwards afforded subject for graceful or playful narrative, seems at this time not to have mentioned to his then only correspondent a fire which, if the wind, which, when it broke out, was northerly, right up the street, had not changed, seemed as if it must have destroyed almost half the town.

³⁰ It was a visit of business, — of which Mr. Newton speaks thus, in one of his unpublished letters, June 14, 1777: — "I dined with Lord Dartmouth, Lord Verney, and about ten gentlemen of the county, at the Swan, on Monday, upon a committee to inspect and report the ruinous state of our bridge. We had such a sumptuous dinner as I suppose was never seen at Olney before. We had a man cook, and a bill of fare from London. Sixteen at table; the ordinary came to nine shillings, but I suppose a guinea apiece would not have defrayed the expense. The town makes good the rest; they made a point of accommodating my lords and gentlemen very handsomely. All was very decent and sociable, but nothing remarkable occurred, and I was well pleased when it was over."

³¹ July 13, 1777.

Seven or eight houses were presently in flames ; the wind then directed the fire backward to a few out-buildings, and thus providentially averted the destruction that was looked for, almost all the houses being thatched, and the season uncommonly dry. This event, in its incidental consequences, produced an effect upon Mr. Newton which in no slight degree influenced his subsequent life, and thereby influenced Cowper's. That part of the loss which had not been covered by insurance was estimated at £450 ; and this fell wholly upon the poor, or upon those who were reduced by it to the poverty against which they had been struggling. It is to the credit of the neighborhood that £230 was immediately contributed toward their relief, at and about home. Lord Dartmouth sent £30. "The plan was to pay twelve shillings in the pound upon buildings, and sixteen upon goods, and to make up the full loss to the poorer sufferers." Mr. Newton, from those sources of private beneficence which were always opened upon his application, promised £60 ; he obtained £200. "Such instances of benevolence," says Mr. Cecil,³² "with the constant assistance he afforded the poor by the help of Mr. Thornton, naturally led him to expect that he should have so much influence as to restrain gross licentiousness on particular occasions ; but to use his own expression, he had 'lived to bury the old crop, on which any dependence could be placed.'"

Mr. Newton, dwelling in his next sermon upon the good Providence which in the midst of judgment had remembered mercy, told the people that he believed prayer had contributed more to stopping the fire than water. "I hope," said he to Mr. Thornton,³³ "it will not soon be forgotten by some ; but, alas ! too many are hardened and daring ; and were it not that there is a few of the Lord's people dispersed up and down the town, who sigh and mourn for the abominations that abound, I should expect the whole would soon be laid in ashes. The people of Sodom scorned Lot ; but their safety wholly depended upon his residence among them. And so it probably was with Noah. But when Noah and Lot were gone, vengeance took place. The people of the

³² Life of Newton.

³³ Nov. 1, 1777.

world little think how much they owe their preservation to those whom they despise. Believers are indeed the salt of the places where they live. By their example and influence they give some check to the spreading corruption of morals, and by their prayers they prevail that wrath is not poured forth to the uttermost. This consideration encourages one to hope likewise on a national account. The Lord has a remnant in it, for the sake of which mercy shall be afforded, though apparently things seem ripening apace for destruction. When a nation is decaying, like an oak that casts its leaves, the Lord's people are like sap in the root — the life and substance which give hope that the tree may revive again." ³⁴

A few months before, ³⁵ he had compared Olney to Jeremiah's two baskets of figs; one basket of good figs, very good; the other of evil figs, very evil, that could not be eaten. "Wickedness," said he, "is grown to a dreadful height; but the greater part of my serious people are precious, humble souls, and well disposed to make a minister happy." He had now reason to know that the evil figs filled the far larger basket; for at the very time when he was exerting himself to the utmost in behalf of the sufferers by the fire, he had a most unexpected and mortifying proof of popular ingratitude and violence. The circumstances are related by him in a letter to Mr. Thornton. ³⁶

"When I met the committee for the fire, I recommended, amongst other means of preventing fire in future, the discontinuance of a foolish custom, almost peculiar to this town, of illuminating their houses on the 5th of November, and likewise preventing bonfires and firing guns in the town. As most of the houses are thatched, I have been yearly apprehensive of mischief. There were about twenty-five persons present, as I thought, of all sorts and parties amongst us. My motion was approved of by every one, and I was desired to give notice of it at church, and I really understood it to be the general sense of the town. But when the day came, there was great opposition. Not only some of the worldly and wicked, but I am sorry to say, the Baptists in

³⁴ Isaiah, vi. 13.

³⁵ March 6, 1777.

³⁶ Nov. 18, 1777.

a body set themselves against it. Many put up candles who had not done so in former years; and some who had, doubled their number. This gave encouragement to the sons of Belial, and when night came on there was much riot and confusion. A wild and lawless mob paraded the streets, breaking windows, and extorting money from one end of the town to the other. My house was expressly threatened. I committed it to the Lord, and seemed in my own mind determined to see what they would do. I still believe that, if they had come, and I had gone out to speak with them, I might have had so much influence with some of them at least, as to have saved my windows. But upon a friend's bringing word, about ten in the evening, that forty or fifty of them, full of fury and liquor, were just coming to beset us, Mrs. Newton was so terrified, and her head so much affected, as it always is upon any alarm, that I was forced to send an embassy and beg peace. A soft message, and a shilling to the captain of the mob, secured his protection, and we slept in safety. Alas, 'tell it not in Gath!' I am ashamed of the story, and have only mentioned it to you. We have some who sigh and mourn for the evils that abound amongst us, but for want of leading men and magistrates, things are come to such a pass, as is indeed a scandal to a place that has been so long favored with the light of the gospel. We dwell among lions and firebrands, with men whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongues a sharp sword.³⁷ And yet, through mercy, the worst of them, taken singly and sober, seem disposed to show me some respect; but in a body, and when influenced with drink, they are terrible creatures."

When Mr. Newton related this occurrence to his biographer, Mr. Cecil, he added, that he believed he should never have left Olney while he lived, had not so incorrigible a spirit prevailed in a parish which he had so long labored to reform.³⁸ He removed to London about two years after-

³⁷ Psalm lvii. 4.

³⁸ Mr. Cecil says, "But I must remark here, that this is no extraordinary fact, nor at all unaccountable. The gospel, we are informed, is not merely 'a savor of life unto life,' but also 'of death unto death.' Those whom it does not soften, it is often found to harden."

wards, when Mr. Thornton presented him to the rectory of the united parishes of St. Mary Woolnoth and St. Mary Woolchurch Haw.

Before his departure he published the 'Olney Hymns,' by which Cowper may be said to have been first introduced to the public as a poet. After stating in his preface that the design had been undertaken partly in the hope that it might form a memorial of a true friendship, Mr. Newton says, "With this pleasing hope I entered upon my part, which would have been smaller than it is, and the book would have appeared much sooner, and in a very different form, if the wise, though mysterious providence of God had not seen fit to cross my wishes. We had not proceeded far upon our proposed plan, before my dear friend was prevented, by a long and affecting indisposition, from affording me any further assistance. My grief and disappointment were great: I hung my harp upon the willows, and for some time thought myself determined to proceed no farther without him. Yet my mind was afterwards led to resume the service. My progress in it, amidst a variety of other engagements, has been slow; yet, in a course of years, the hymns amounted to a considerable number; and my deference to the judgment and desires of others has at length overcome the reluctance I long felt to see them in print, while I had so few of my friend's hymns to insert in the collection. Though it is possible a good judge of composition might be able to distinguish those which are his, I have thought it proper to prevent a misapplication by sub-joining the letter C to each of them."

The Olney Hymns, though they met with some opposition in a quarter where it was little expected, obtained a considerable sale. Mr. Thornton took a thousand copies for distribution; but Cowper's influence would never have extended beyond the sphere in which those hymns circulated, and would have been little there, if he himself had continued under the influence of Mr. Newton. Mr. Newton would not have thought of encouraging him to exercise his genius in any thing but devotional poetry; and he found it impossible to engage him again in that, because of the unhappy form which his hallucination had assumed. One

whose intentions are so purely benevolent, and whose zeal so sincere, can hardly be induced to suspect that peradventure he may have been mistaken in his way of doing good, and that, with the best motives, he may have produced an injurious effect. Yet such a suspicion seems to have been almost forced upon him, by what he observed at Olney; and nothing can be more ingenuous than the manner in which he unbosoms himself to his friend and benefactor, Mr. Thornton.

“A young woman in this town is disordered in mind, so far as to be, I think, a proper subject for Bethlehem or St. Luke’s. Her family is in the lowest state of poverty. Her father is a wicked man; her mother, I hope, has some little sense of spiritual things; her aunt, who lives with them, is a very gracious woman, but very infirm, and I believe has not been more than ten times out of her house since I have been at Olney. They were in much distress before, but the girl’s distraction has greatly heightened it; and as only the aunt belongs to this parish, I think, if I had not contributed something to their support, they must have nearly been starved. The mother has been with me this morning; they have been under this affliction several months, and the girl grows worse. They can get no rest at night, nor manage her by day, though she takes up their whole time. I should be very glad if she could be got into one of the hospitals, and therefore thought I would take the liberty of mentioning it to you. I hope the poor girl is not without some concern about her soul; and, indeed, I believe a concern of this kind was the beginning of her disorder. I believe my name is up about the country for preaching people mad; for whether it is owing to the sedentary life the women live here, poring over their pillows for ten or twelve hours every day, and breathing confined air in their crowded little rooms, or whatever may be the immediate cause, I suppose we have near a dozen, in different degrees disordered in their heads, and most of them, I believe, truly gracious people. This has been no small trial to me, and I have felt sometimes as I suppose David might feel when the Lord smote Uzza for touching the ark. He was displeased; and I have found my spirit rising against what He sees fit

to permit. But if He brings them through fire and water safe to his kingdom, whatever they may suffer by the way, they are less to be pitied than the mad people of the world, who think themselves in their senses, and take occasion to scoff at the gospel, as if it was only fit to drive people out of their senses. Perhaps the Lord permits these things, in judgment, that they who seek occasion for stumbling and cavilling may have what they want. I trust there is nothing in my preaching that tends to cast those down who ought to be comforted."

CHAPTER IX.

COWPER AT OLNEY. FIRST VOLUME OF HIS POEMS. LADY AUSTEN.

HITHERTO Cowper had had no other society at Olney than that of Mr. Newton's visitants, and his occasional inmates,—chiefly young men from the university, who had determined upon taking what is called the evangelical line, and therefore placed themselves under him to finish their education. Next to the duties of his ministry, Mr. Newton had made it the business of his life to attend his afflicted friend;¹ and now, before his departure, prevailing over the strong reluctance which Cowper still felt at seeing a stranger, he introduced to him the Reverend William Bull, a dissenting minister, who was settled in the adjacent town of Newport Pagnell. Feelings of compassion induced Mr. Bull to consider it as "a duty to visit him once a fortnight;"² he soon became attached to Cowper, and by his own amiable disposition, congenial taste, and cultivated understanding, gradually gained his cordial and confidential esteem.

The removal of one with whom he had lived twelve years in habits of daily intercourse, and of the most unre-

¹ Dr. Johnson's Sketch of the Life of Cowper. They are Mr. Newton's own words, in a letter to Dr. Johnson, after Cowper's death.

² Hayley, vol. i. p. 120

served intimacy, was severely felt by Cowper. In a letter to Mrs. Newton,³ he says, "The vicarage-house became a melancholy object, as soon as Mr. Newton had left it: when you left it, it became more melancholy: now it is actually occupied by another family, I cannot even look at it without being shocked. As I walked in the garden this evening, I saw the smoke issue from the study chimney, and said to myself, That used to be a sign that Mr. Newton was there; but it is so no longer. The walls of the house know nothing of the change that has taken place; the bolt of the chamber-door sounds just as it used to do; and when Mr. P—— goes up stairs, for aught I know, or ever shall know, the fall of his foot could hardly, perhaps, be distinguished from that of Mr. Newton. But Mr. Newton's foot will never be heard upon that staircase again. These reflections, and such as these, occurred to me upon the occasion; * * *

* * *. If I were in a condition to leave Olney too, I certainly would not stay in it. It is no attachment to the place that binds me here, but an unfitness for every other. I lived in it once, but now I am buried in it, and have no business with the world on the outside of my sepulchre: my appearance would startle them, and theirs would be shocking to me.

"Such are my thoughts about the matter. Others are more deeply affected, and by more weighty considerations, having been many years the objects of a ministry which they had reason to account themselves happy in the possession of."

Some time before this separation, Cowper had been rendered somewhat uneasy concerning his circumstances, a letter from Mr. Hill⁴ having given him reason to apprehend some defalcation in his scanty means. "I shall be glad," he says in his reply, "if you will let me know whether I am to understand by the sorrow you express, that any part of my former supplies is actually cut off, or whether they are only more tardy in coming in, than usual. It is useful, even to the rich, to know, as nearly as may be, the exact amount of their income; but how much more so to a man

³ March 4, 1780.

⁴ January 1, 1778.

of my small dimensions. If the former should be the case, I shall have less reason to be surprised, than I have to wonder at the continuance of them so long. Favors are favors indeed, when laid out upon so barren a soil, where the expense of sowing is never accompanied by the smallest hope of return. What pain there is in gratitude, I have often felt; but the pleasure of requiting an obligation has always been out of my reach."

A few months afterwards he was informed of Sir Thomas Hesketh's death. "Poor Sir Thomas," he says, "I knew that I had a place in his affections, and from his own information, many years ago, a place in his will; but little thought that after the lapse of so many years I should still retain it. His remembrance of me, after so long a season of separation, has done me much honor, and leaves me the more reason to regret his decease."⁵

The death of Sir Thomas proved, in its eventual consequences, of the greatest importance to Cowper; but at the time, the elevation of his old associate Thurlow to the chancellorship appeared of much more to some of his sanguine friends, who measured the attachment of others towards him by their own. Mr. Unwin, with whom, about this time, he began to correspond, frequently advised him to recall himself to the recollection of one in whose power it now was to relieve him from all anxieties concerning his income, by performing a promise which was not the less binding because of the half-sportive, half-serious mood in which it had been made.⁶ Cowper replied to this suggestion thus:—

DEAR UNWIN,

June 18, 1778.

I feel myself much obliged to you for your kind intimation, and have given the subject of it all my best attention, both before I received your letter and since. The result is, that I am persuaded it will be better not to write. I know the man and his disposition well; he is very liberal in his way of thinking, generous, and discerning. He is well aware of the tricks that are played upon such

⁵ April 11, 1778.

⁶ Page 30.

occasions ; and, after fifteen years' interruption of all intercourse between us, would translate my letter into this language — Pray remember the poor. This would disgust him, because he would think our former intimacy disgraced by such an oblique application. He has not forgotten me ; and if he had, there are those about him who cannot come into his presence without reminding him of me ; and he is also perfectly acquainted with my circumstances. It would perhaps give him pleasure to surprise me with a benefit ; and if he means me such a favor, I should disappoint him by asking it. Thus he dealt with my friend Mr. Hill, to whom, by the way, I introduced him, and to all my family connections in town. He sent for him the week before last, and without any solicitation, freely gave him one of his secretaryships. I know not the income ; but as Mr. Hill is in good circumstances, and the gift was unasked, I dare say it is no trifle.

I repeat my thanks for your suggestion ; you see a part of my reasons for thus conducting myself ; if we were together, I could give you more.

Yours affectionately,

W. C.

It is not easy, nor is it always possible, for men in power to serve one who is not in a situation to serve himself. There came a time when Thurlow might properly have solicited a pension for Cowper, and, no doubt, could have obtained it ; and that he neglected to do so, must ever be considered as some discredit to his memory. But at this time he had justified the opinion which Cowper entertained of him, and shown himself not unmindful of his old friends, by surprising Mr. Hill with an appointment. "This," said Cowper, "is just according to the character of the man. He will give grudgingly in answer to solicitation, but delights in surprising those he esteems with his bounty." The increase of business which this brought with it, had the effect of shortening Hill's letters. "If I had had the horns of a snail," says his friend, "I should have drawn them in the moment I saw the reason of your epistolary

brevity, because I felt it too. May your seven reams be multiplied into fourteen, till your letters become truly Lacedæmonian, and are reduced to a single syllable! Though I shall be a sufferer by the effect, I shall rejoice in the cause. You are naturally formed for business, and such a head as yours can never have too much of it. Though my predictions have been fulfilled in two instances, I do not plume myself much upon my sagacity; because it required but little to foresee that Thurlow would be chancellor, and that you would have a crowded office."

At this time Cowper neither thought himself neglected by Thurlow, nor had any reason to think so. He wrote some stanzas on his promotion, and sent them to Hill: "I wrote them indeed," he says, "on purpose for you; for my subjects are not always such as I could hope would prove agreeable to you. My mind has always a melancholy cast, and is like some pools I have seen, which, though filled with a black and putrid water, will, nevertheless, in a bright day, reflect the sunbeams from their surface."⁷

He strove against that "black and diseased melancholy," and sought to divert or mitigate it by healthful exercise of body and of mind. Cowper, indeed, when in a state of moral responsibility, seems to have beautifully exemplified that true practical philosophy, which makes the most of little pleasures and the best of every thing. He was now about to garden upon what was to him a greater scale; and having been made to feel the necessity of economizing in his amusements, called upon his friend Unwin to assist him in "a design to cheat the glazier."⁸ "Government," said he, "has laid a tax upon glass, and he has trebled it. I want as much as will serve for a large frame, but am unwilling to pay an exorbitant price for it. I shall be obliged to you, therefore, if you will inquire at a glass manufacturer's how he sells his Newcastle glass, such as is used for frames and hothouses. If you will be so good as to send me this information, and at the same time the manufacturer's address,

⁷ Nov. 14, 1779.

⁸ May 26, 1779.

I will execute the rest of the business myself, without giving you any farther trouble." He did wisely in thus restricting his agent's power; the London tradesman proved not more reasonable than the Olney one, and Cowper, upon receiving his terms, replied,⁹ "If you please, you may give my service to Mr. James M—, glazier, and tell him that I have furnished myself with glass from Bedford for half the money."

Another commission followed.¹⁰ "*Amico mio*, be pleased to buy me a glazier's diamond pencil. I have glazed the two frames designed to receive my pine plants. But I cannot mend the kitchen windows till, by the help of that implement, I can reduce the glass to its proper dimensions. If I were a plumber, I should be a complete glazier; and possibly the happy time may come when I shall be seen trudging away to the neighboring towns with a shelf of glass hanging at my back. If government should impose another tax upon that commodity, I hardly know a business in which a gentleman might more successfully employ himself. A Chinese, of ten times my fortune, would avail himself of such an opportunity without scruple; and why should not I, who want money as much as any mandarin in China? Rousseau would have been charmed to have seen me so occupied, and would have exclaimed with rapture, 'that he had found the Emilius, who (he supposed) had subsisted only in his own idea.' I would recommend it to you to follow my example. You will presently qualify yourself for the task, and may not only amuse yourself at home, but may even exercise your skill in mending the church windows; which, as it would save money to the parish, would conduce, together with your other ministerial accomplishments, to make you extremely popular in the place."

Touching upon the same subject to Mr. Newton,¹¹ and comparing his own feelings with those of most other men, Cowper says, "At present, the difference between them and me is greatly to their advantage. I delight in bawbles, and know them to be so; for rested in, and viewed without

⁹ July, 1779.

¹⁰ To Mr. Unwin, Sept. 21, 1779.

¹¹ May 3, 1780.

a reference to their Author, what is the earth, what are the planets, what is the sun itself, but a bawble? Better for a man never to have seen them, or to see them with the eyes of a brute, stupid and unconscious of what he beholds, than not to be able to say, 'The Maker of all these wonders is my Friend!' Their eyes have never been opened, to see that they are trifles; mine have been, and will be till they are closed forever. They think a fine estate, a large conservatory, a hothouse rich as a West Indian garden, things of consequence; visit them with pleasure, and muse upon them with ten times more. I am pleased with a frame of four lights, doubtful whether the few pines it contains will ever be worth a farthing; amuse myself with a greenhouse which Lord Bute's gardener could take upon his back and walk away with; and when I have paid it the accustomed visit, and watered it, and given it air, I say to myself—'This is not mine; 'tis a plaything lent me for the present; I must leave it soon.'"

With the love of reading, the love of writing also had returned, and Cowper amused himself with versifying upon various occasions; but this gave place for a while to a passion for drawing. "I deal much in ink," he says, "but not such ink as is employed by poets and writers of essays. Mine is a harmless fluid, and guilty of no deceptions but such as may prevail without the least injury to the person imposed on. I draw mountains, valleys, woods, and streams, and ducks and dabchicks. I admire them myself, and Mrs. Unwin admires them, and her praise and my praise, put together, are fame enough for me."

Some employment, in the way of his old profession, his neighbors occasionally gave him,—in kindness to themselves. "I know less of the law," he says to Mr. Hill,¹² "than a country attorney, yet sometimes I think I have almost as much business. My former connection with the profession has got wind; and, though I earnestly profess and protest, and proclaim it abroad, that I know nothing of the matter, they cannot be persuaded to believe that a head once indued with a legal periwig can ever be deficient in those natural endowments it is supposed to cover. I have

¹² May 6, 1780.

had the good fortune¹³ to be once or twice in the right, which, added to the cheapness of a gratuitous counsel, has advanced my credit to a degree I never expected to attain in the capacity of a lawyer. Indeed, if two of the wisest in the science of jurisprudence may give opposite opinions on the same point, which does not unfrequently happen, it seems to be a matter of indifference whether a man answers by rule or at a venture. He that stumbles upon the right side of the question, is just as useful to his client, as he that arrives at the same end by regular approaches, and is conducted to the mark he aims at by the greatest authorities."

The "Report of an adjudged Case, not to be found in any of the Books," was written about this time. "Happy," said he, when he transcribed it for his friend Hill, "is the man who knows just so much of the law as to make himself a little merry now and then with the solemnity of judicial proceedings." In a darker mood, he said to Mr. Newton,¹⁴ "I wonder that a sportive thought should ever knock at the door of my intellects, and still more that it should gain admittance. It is as if Harlequin should intrude himself into the gloomy chamber where a corpse is deposited in state. His antic gesticulations would be unseasonable at any rate, but more especially so if they should distort the features of the mournful attendants with laughter. But the mind, long wearied with the sameness of a dull, dreary prospect, will gladly fix its eyes on any thing that may make a little variety in its contemplations, though it was but a kitten playing with her tail." "Cowper's taste," says Sir Egerton Brydges,¹⁵ "lay in a smiling, colloquial, good-natured humor; his melancholy was a black and diseased melancholy, not a grave and rich contemplative-

¹³ Mr. Newton had some reliance upon his skill. "I have drawn up a clause," he says, "to be inserted in Mrs. ———'s will, which my dear friend Mr. Cowper has looked over and approves, and says it will pass very well as to the forms of law; for in what does not immediately concern himself, his judgment is as clear as ever." 14 Jan. 1775.

This was at the commencement of his recovery.

¹⁴ July 12, 1780.

¹⁵ *Recollections of Foreign Travel*, vol. i. p. 242.

ness." It was black because it was morbid ; but it assumed a better character in his writings, when a fortunate direction was given it.

Mrs. Unwin was the first who excited him to undertake something of greater pith and moment than he had ever before produced. She urged him to write a poem of considerable length, and as moral satire was equally congenial to his taste and accordant to his views, she suggested, as a theme, the Progress of Error. Mr. Newton was the only person to whom his intention was communicated while he was engaged upon it ; and notwithstanding the tone and purport of his poetry, he seems to have thought that Mr. Newton might disapprove it. "Don't be alarmed," he says to him ;¹⁶ "I ride Pegasus with a curb. He will never run away with me again. I have even convinced Mrs. Unwin that I can manage him, and make him stop when I please." In the same letter, he says, "If human nature may be compared to a piece of tapestry, (and why not ?) then human nature, as it subsists in me, though it is sadly faded on the right side, retains all its color on the wrong. I am pleased with commendation, and though not passionately desirous of indiscriminate praise, or what is generally called popularity, yet when a judicious friend claps me on the back, I own I find it an encouragement. At this season of the year, and in this gloomy, uncomfortable climate, it is no easy matter for the owner of a mind like mine, to divert it from sad subjects, and fix it upon such as may administer to its amusement. Poetry, above all things, is useful to me in this respect. While I am held in pursuit of pretty images, or a pretty way of expressing them, I forget every thing that is irksome, and, like a boy that plays truant, determine to avail myself of the present opportunity to be amused, and to put by the disagreeable recollection that I must, after all, go home and be whipped again."

The Progress of Error met with Mr. Newton's approbation, and it was speedily followed by three other poems of the same kind — Truth, Table Talk, and Expostulation,

¹⁶ Dec. 21, 1780.

So eagerly did he enter into this undertaking, and pursue it, that the first of these poems sprung up in the month of December, and the last in the month of March following.

Upon sending *Table Talk* to Mr. Newton, he said to him, "It is a medley of many things, some that may be useful, and some that, for aught I know, may be very diverting. I am merry that I may decoy people into my company, and grave that they may be the better for it. Now and then I put on the garb of a philosopher, and take the opportunity that disguise procures me, to drop a word in favor of religion. In short, there is some froth, and here and there a bit of sweetmeat, which seems to entitle it justly to the name of a certain dish the ladies call a trifle. I did not choose to be more facetious, lest I should consult the taste of my readers at the expense of my own approbation; nor more serious than I have been, lest I should forfeit theirs. A poet in my circumstances has a difficult part to act; one minute obliged to bridle his humor, if he has any, and the next to clap a spur to the sides of it; now ready to weep from a sense of the importance of his subject, and on a sudden constrained to laugh, lest his gravity should be mistaken for dulness. If this be not violent exercise for the mind, I know not what is; and if any man doubt it, let him try. Whether all this management and contrivance be necessary, I do not know, but am inclined to suspect that if my Muse was to go forth clad in Quaker color, without one bit of riband to enliven her appearance, she might walk from one end of London to the other, as little noticed as if she were one of the sisterhood indeed." ¹⁷

The four poems contained about two thousand five hundred lines; and these he thought, with a few select smaller pieces, about seven or eight perhaps, the best he could find in a bookful which he had by him, would furnish a volume, of tolerable bulk, that needed not to be indebted to an unreasonable breadth of margin for the importance of its figure. The letters which Cowper received seem either not

¹⁷ Feb. 18, 1781.

to have been preserved by him, or to have been destroyed by others ; and with this part of his correspondence many circumstances which would have thrown light upon his history have perished. It is not known whether the intention of publishing his poems originated at Olney, or was suggested by Mr. Newton ; but he has told us what the reasons were which actuated him.

"If a board of inquiry were to be established, at which poets were to undergo an examination respecting the motives that induced them to publish, and I were to be summoned to attend, that I might give an account of mine, I think I could truly say, what perhaps few poets could, that though I have no objection to lucrative consequences, if any such should follow, they are not my aim ; much less is it my ambition to exhibit myself to the world as a genius. What then, says Mr. President, can possibly be your motive ? I answer, with a bow — Amusement. There is nothing but this, — no occupation within the compass of my small sphere, poetry excepted, — that can do much towards diverting that train of melancholy thoughts, which, when I am not thus employed, are forever pouring themselves in upon me. And if I did not publish what I write, I could not interest myself sufficiently in my own success, to make an amusement of it."¹⁸

The business of finding a publisher was undertaken by Mr. Newton, who found one in his old friend Johnson,¹⁹ with whom he had had dealings of his own. The publisher took upon himself the whole risk, but seems to have requested that the book should not appear as an anonymous work. When this was communicated to the poet, he

¹⁸ To Mr. Newton, March 18, 1781.

¹⁹ When the Olney Hymns were about to be printed, Mr. Newton said in a letter to Mr. Thornton, (Feb. 13, 1779,) "To you I entirely submit the choice of the printer or bookseller. If it was a matter of perfect indifference to you, I have had a thought of my old friend, Joseph Johnson, in St. Paul's Churchyard. He printed my narrative and volume of Sermons ; and though he is not a professor, I believe him a man of honor and integrity."

In a former letter, (Feb. 2, 1773,) he had said, "I am afraid things are come to that pass, that professors in general find they may more safely depend upon the people of the world, than upon one another."

replied, "Since writing is become one of my principal amusements, and I have already produced so many verses on subjects that entitle them to a hope that they may possibly be useful, I should be sorry to suppress them entirely, or to publish them to no purpose, for want of that chief ingredient, the name of the author. If my name, therefore, will serve them in any degree, as a passport into public notice, they are welcome to it; and Mr. Johnson will, if he pleases, announce me to the world by the style and title of

WILLIAM COWPER, Esq.
Of the Inner Temple." ²⁰

It was not till all preliminaries had been adjusted that Cowper acquainted Mr. Unwin with his intentions. "You may suppose," he said, "by the size of the publication, (an octavo volume, price three shillings,) that the greatest part of the poems have been long kept secret; but the truth is, that they are, most of them, except what you have in your possession, the produce of the last winter. The principal, I may say the only reason why I never mentioned to you till now an affair which I am just going to make known to all the world, (if *that* Mr. All-the-world should think it worth his knowing,) has been this, — that till within these few days I had not the honor to know it myself. This may seem strange, but it is true; for not knowing where to find underwriters who would choose to insure them, and not finding it convenient to a purse like mine to run any hazard, even upon the credit of my own ingenuity, I was very much in doubt for some weeks whether any bookseller would be willing to subject himself to an ambiguity that might prove very expensive in case of a bad market. But Johnson has heroically set all peradventures at defiance, and taken the whole charge upon himself. So out I come!" ²¹

Mr. Newton had been a little jealous that his friend dealt more liberally with Mr. Unwin in the way of poetical export, than with him! ²² It was now Unwin's turn to feel a

²⁰ To Mr. Newton, March 5, 1781.

²¹ May 1, 1781.

²² To Mr. Newton, July 30, 1781.

jealousy of the same kind. "I expected," says Cowper, "you would be grieved; if you had not been so, those sensibilities which attend you upon every other occasion, must have left you upon this. I am sorry that I have given you pain, but not sorry that you have felt it. A concern of that sort would be absurd, because it would be to regret your friendship for me, and to be dissatisfied with the effect of it. Allow yourself, however, three minutes only for reflection, and your penetration must necessarily dive into the motives of my conduct. In the first place, and by way of preface, remember that I do not (whatever your partiality may incline you to do) account it of much consequence to any friend of mine, whether he is or is not employed by me upon such an occasion. But, all affected renunciations of poetical merit apart, (and all unaffected expressions of the sense I have of my own littleness in the poetical character too,) the obvious and only reason why I resorted to Mr. Newton, and not to my friend Unwin, was this — that the former lived in London, the latter at Stock; the former was upon the spot to correct the press, to give instructions respecting any sudden alterations, and to settle with the publisher every thing that might possibly occur in the course of such a business: — the latter could not be applied to for these purposes, without what would be a manifest encroachment on his kindness; because it might happen, that a troublesome office might cost him now and then a journey, which it was absolutely impossible for me to endure the thought of.

"When I wrote to you for the copies you have sent me, I told you I was making a collection, but not with a design to publish. There is nothing truer than at that time I had not the smallest expectation of sending a volume of Poems to the press. I had several small pieces that might amuse, but I would not, when I publish, make the amusement of the reader my only object. When the winter deprived me of other employments, I began to compose, and seeing six or seven months before me which would naturally afford me much leisure for such a purpose, I undertook a piece of some length; that finished, another; and so on, till I had amassed the number of lines I mentioned in my last.

"Believe of me what you please, but not that I am indifferent to you or your friendship for me on any occasion." ²³

When Mr. Newton objected to any thing in the manuscript, Cowper seems generally to have justified, and then to have altered or expunged it, in deference to his friend. Upon occasion of some strong expression which had not been allowed to pass the censure, he says, "I little suspected you would object to it. — I am no friend to the use of words taken from what an uncle of mine called the diabolical dictionary; but it happens sometimes that a coarse expression is almost necessary to do justice to the indignation excited by an abominable subject." He thanked him, however, for his opinion, and said, that "though poetry is apt to betray one into a warmth that one is not sensible of in writing prose, he should always desire to be set down by it." ²⁴

Upon a similar occasion he replies to Mr. Newton — "The passage you object to I inserted merely by way of catch, and think it is not unlikely to answer the purpose. My design was to say as many serious things as I could, and yet to be as lively as was compatible with such a purpose. Do not imagine that I mean to stickle for it as a pretty creature of my own that I am loath to part with, — but I am apprehensive that without the sprightliness of that passage to introduce it, the following paragraph would not show to advantage. If the world had been filled with men like myself, I should never have written it; but thinking myself in a measure obliged to tickle, if I meant to please, I therefore affected a jocularly I did not feel. As to the rest, wherever there is war, there is misery and outrage; notwithstanding which, it is not only lawful to wish, but even a duty to pray, for the success of one's country. And as to the neutralities, I really think the Russian virago an impertinent puss for meddling with us, and engaging half a score kittens of her acquaintance to scratch the poor old lion, who, if he has been insolent in his day, has probably acted no otherwise than they themselves would have acted

²³ May 10, 1781.

²⁴ Feb. 18, 1781.

in his circumstances, and with his power to imbolden them." ²⁵

This brought a rejoinder, and in a tone to which Cowper immediately yielded, saying, "I am sorry that I gave you the trouble to write twice upon so trivial a subject as the passage in question. I did not understand, by your first objection to it, that you thought it so exceptionable as you do; but being better informed, I immediately resolved to expunge it, and subjoin a few lines which you will oblige me by substituting in its place. I am not very fond of weaving a political thread into any of my pieces, and that for two reasons; first, because I do not think myself qualified, in point of intelligence, to form a decided opinion on any such topics, and secondly, because I think them, though perhaps as popular as any, the most useless of all." ²⁶

Upon sending to Mr. Newton what he called his "Works complete, bound in brown paper," and numbered according to the series in which he would have them published, Cowper called upon his friend for further assistance. "With respect to the poem called '*Truth*,'" said he, "it is so *true*, that it can hardly fail of giving offence to an unenlightened reader. I think, therefore, that in order to obviate in some measure those prejudices that will naturally erect their bristles against it, an explanatory preface, ²⁷ such as you (and nobody so well as you) can furnish me with, will have every grace of propriety to recommend it. Or, if you are not averse to the task, and your avocations will allow you to undertake it, I should be glad to be indebted to you for a preface to the whole." ²⁸ Mr. Newton demurred, upon the ground of his own incompetence for such a task; to this Cowper replied, that not having the least doubt him-

²⁵ March 5, 1781.

²⁶ March 18.

²⁷ The origin of this request seems to be intimated in a letter written some two months before, just after one of Mr. Newton's publications (probably his *Cardiphonia*) had reached Olney: "I shall not repeat to you," says Cowper, "what I said to Mrs. Unwin after having read two or three of the letters. I admire the Preface, in which you have given an air of novelty to a worn-out topic, and have actually engaged the favor of the reader by saying those things in a delicate and uncommon way, which in general are disgusting." Jan. 21.

²⁸ April 8, 1781.

self upon that score, and being convinced that there ought to be none, he neither withdrew his requisition, nor abated one jot of the earnestness with which it was made. "I admit," said he, "the delicacy of the occasion, but am far from apprehending that you will therefore find it difficult to succeed. You can draw a hair-stroke, where another man would make a blot as broad as a sixpence."²⁹

All preliminaries having thus, as it seemed, been arranged, Cowper thought that while the three first of his longer poems were under the printer's hands, he might "be spinning and weaving the last," which, in his own opinion, ("for an opinion," said he, "I am obliged to have about what I write, whether I will or no,") he was writing with more emphasis and energy than in either of his others. The whole he hoped would be ready for publication before the proper season should be past, — for new books have their season, like most articles that are carried to market. He looked to this with a degree of pleasurable impatience. But if the art of printing had been in use in the land of Uz, Job, when he wished that his enemy had written a book, might have wished that he would print it also. When this hope had been two months delayed, Cowper writes thus to Mr. Unwin: —

"If a writer's friends have need of patience, how much more the writer! Your desire to see my Muse in public, and mine to gratify you, must both suffer the mortification of delay. I expected that my trumpeter would have informed the world by this time of all that is needful for them to know upon such an occasion; and that an advertising blast blown through every newspaper would have said — 'The poet is coming!' — But man, especially man that writes verse, is born to disappointments, as surely as printers and booksellers are born to be the most dilatory and tedious of all creatures. The plain English of this magnificent preamble is, that the season of publication is just elapsed, that the town is going into the country every day, and that my book cannot appear till they return, — that is to say, not till next winter. This misfortune, however,

comes not without its attendant advantage; I shall now have, what I should not otherwise have had, an opportunity to correct the press myself—no small advantage upon any occasion, but especially important where poetry is concerned. A single erratum may knock out the brains of a whole passage, and that perhaps of which of all others the unfortunate poet is the most proud. Add to this, that now and then there is to be found in a printing-house a presumptuous intermeddler, who will fancy himself a poet too, and, what is still worse, a better than he that employs him. The consequence is, that with cobbling, and tinkering, and patching on here and there a shred of his own, he makes such a difference between the original and the copy, that an author cannot know his own work again. Now, as I choose to be responsible for nobody's dulness but my own, I am a little comforted when I reflect, that it will be in my power to prevent all such impertinence."

Before the expiration of that month, however, Johnson had begun to print. Much to the credit of his discernment, he manifested a more than ordinary interest in the contents of the volume which he was to publish, and perused them critically in the proof-sheets. Cowper, when he was informed of this, replied, "I had rather submit to chastisement now, than be obliged to undergo it hereafter. If Johnson, therefore, will mark with a marginal *Q* those lines that he, or his, object to as not sufficiently finished, I will willingly retouch them, or give a reason for my refusal. I shall moreover think myself obliged by any hint of that sort; as I do already to somebody, who, by running here and there two or three paragraphs into one, has very much improved the arrangement of my matter. I am apt, I know, to fritter it into too many pieces, and by doing so, to disturb that order to which all writings must owe their perspicuity,—at least in a considerable measure."³⁰ After a while he says, "Johnson uses the discretion my poetship has allowed him, with much discernment. He has suggested several alterations, or rather marked several defective passages, which I have corrected, much to the advantage

³⁰ July 7, 1781.

of the poems. In the last sheet he sent me, he noticed three such, all which I have reduced into better order. In the foregoing sheet I assented to his criticisms in some instances, and chose to abide by the original expression in others. Thus we jog on together comfortably enough; and perhaps it would be as well for authors in general, if their booksellers, when men of some taste, were allowed, though not to tinker the work themselves, yet to point out the flaws, and humbly to recommend an improvement."³¹

Cowper now pleased himself with a second-sight of unborn volumes. He says to Mr. Newton, "I am in the middle of an affair called 'Conversation,' which, as 'Table Talk' serves in the present volume by way of introductory fiddle to the band that follows, I design shall perform the same office in a second."³² — "It is not a dialogue, as the title would lead you to surmise, nor does it bear the least resemblance to 'Table Talk,' except that it is serio-comic, like all the rest. My design in it is to convince the world that they make but an indifferent use of their tongues, considering the intention of Providence when he endued them with the faculty of speech; to point out the abuses, which is the jocular part of the business; and to prescribe the remedy, which is the grave and sober."³³ Upon Johnson's expressing a wish to him that his pen might still be employed, he offered him this then unfinished poem, which he estimated at eight hundred lines, if he chose to swell the volume; he was told in reply, not to be afraid of making the volume too large, which Cowper interpreted to mean, that if he had still another piece, there would be room for it. Another was upon the stocks. "I have already," said he, "begun, and proceeded a little way, in a poem called Retirement. My view in choosing that subject is to direct to the proper use of the opportunities it affords for the cultivation of a man's best interests; to censure the vices and the follies which people carry with them into their retreats, where they make no other use of their leisure than to gratify themselves with the indulgence of their favorite appetites, and to pay themselves, by a life of pleasure, for a life

³¹ Aug. 25.³² July 22.³³ Aug. —

of business. In conclusion, I would enlarge upon the happiness of that state, when discreetly enjoyed and religiously improved. But all this is at present in embryo. I generally despair of my progress when I begin; but if, like my travelling 'Squire,³⁴ I should kindle as I go, this likewise may make a part of the volume, for I have time enough before me."³⁵

To an impatient author (and those who are young in authorship are generally impatient) the press always seems to proceed slowly. Cowper saw that Johnson having begun to print had given some sort of security for his perseverance, else the tardiness of his operations, he said, would almost tempt him to despair of the end. When he received a sort of apology for the printer's negligence, and a promise of greater diligence for the future, he observed there was need enough of both,³⁶ and that, though he saw there was time enough before him, he saw likewise that no length of time could be sufficient for the accomplishment of a work that did not go forward.³⁷ "By Johnson's last note," he says to Mr. Newton, "I am ready to suspect that you have seen him, and endeavored to quicken his proceedings. His assurance of greater expedition leads me to think so. I know little of booksellers or printers, but have heard from others that they are the most dilatory of all people; otherwise, I am not in a hurry, nor would be so troublesome; but am obliged to you, nevertheless, for your interference, if his promised alacrity be owing to any spur that you have given him."³⁸ Cowper's impatience, however, did not go beyond the degree of pleasurable excitement. A proof-sheet was always something to expect from post to post, which it would be a pleasure to receive. The summer of this year was probably the happiest he had ever passed, and it proved in its consequence the most important.

The season was unusually hot; to such a degree indeed that Cowper said to Mr. Newton,³⁹ "You seldom complain of too much sunshine, and if you are prepared for a heat somewhat like that of Africa, the south walk in our long garden will exactly suit you. Reflected from the gravel

³⁴ In the "Progress of Error."

³⁷ Aug. 16.

³⁶ Aug. 25.

³⁸ Aug. 25.

³⁹ July 22.

³⁸ May 28,

and from the walls, and beating upon your head at the same time, it may possibly make you wish you could enjoy for an hour or two that immensity of shade afforded by the gigantic trees still growing in the land of your captivity." This heat seems to have led to the first attempt at improving his comforts at Olney — a very humble one; but Cowper knew how to value little enjoyments. He writes to Mr. Newton,⁴⁰ "I might date my letter from the greenhouse, which we have converted into a summer parlor. The walls hung with garden mats, and the floor covered with a carpet, the sun, too, in a great measure excluded by an awning of mats which forbids him to shine any where except upon the carpet, it affords us by far the pleasantest retreat in Olney. We eat, drink, and sleep where we always did; but here we spend all the rest of our time, and find that the sound of the wind in the trees, and the singing of birds, are much more agreeable to our ears than the incessant barking of dogs and screaming of children. It is an observation that naturally occurs upon the occasion, and which many other occasions furnish an opportunity to make, that people long for what they have not, and overlook the good in their possession. This is so true in the present instance, that for years past I should have thought myself happy to enjoy a retirement even less flattering to my natural taste than this in which I am now writing; and have often looked wistfully at a snug cottage, which, on account of its situation at a distance from noise and disagreeable objects, seemed to promise me all I could wish or expect, so far as happiness may be said to be local; never once advertent to this comfortable nook, which affords me all that could be found in the most sequestered hermitage, with the advantage of having all those accommodations near at hand which no hermitage could possibly afford me. People imagine they should be happy in circumstances which they would find insupportably burdensome in less than a week. A man that has been clothed in fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day, envies the peasant under a thatched hovel; who, in return, envies him as much his palace and his pleasure-ground. Could they change situa-

⁴⁰ Aug. 16.

tions, the fine gentleman would find his ceilings were too low, and that his casements admitted too much wind ; that he had no cellar for his wine, and no wine to put in his cellar. These, with a thousand other mortifying deficiencies, would shatter his romantic project into innumerable fragments in a moment. The clown, at the same time, would find the accession of so much unwieldy treasure an encumbrance quite incompatible with an hour's ease. His choice would be puzzled by variety. He would drink to excess, because he would foresee no end of his abundance ; and he would eat himself sick for the same reason. He would have no idea of any other happiness than sensual gratification ; would make himself a beast, and die of his good fortune. The rich gentleman had, perhaps, or might have had, if he pleased, at the shortest notice, just such a recess as this ; but if he had it, he overlooked it, or, if he had it not, forgot that he might command it whenever he would. The rustic, too, was actually in possession of some blessings, which he was a fool to relinquish, but which he could neither see nor feel, because he had the daily and constant use of them ; such as good health, bodily strength, a head and a heart that never ached, and temperance, to the practice of which he was bound by necessity, that, humanly speaking, was a pledge and a security for the continuance of them all.

“ Thus I have sent you a schoolboy's theme. When I write to you, I do not write without thinking, but always without premeditation : the consequence is, that such thoughts as pass through my head when I am not writing make the subject of my letters to you.”

In this greenhouse, “ the myrtles, ranged before his window, made the most agreeable blind imaginable ; he was undisturbed by noise, and saw none but pleasing objects.” Fortunately he was not in this favorite retreat one day when two ladies happened to call at a shop opposite Mrs. Unwin's house. The one, by name Mrs. Jones, was one of their very few acquaintance, the wife of a clergyman, who resided in the village of Clifton, within a mile of Olney ; Lady Austen, the other, was her sister, and widow of a baronet. Cowper was so struck by her appearance, that,

upon hearing who she was, he requested Mrs. Unwin would invite them to tea. Shy as he was, this was an extraordinary movement on his part: his shyness returned when the invitation had been accepted; he wondered at himself, and was for a long while unwilling to face the little party which had been invited at his own desire; his better mind at last prevailed; and the shyest persons are perhaps the most unreserved when they meet with those with whom they feel themselves in sympathy. "Having forced himself," says Hayley, "to engage in conversation with Lady Austen, he was so reanimated by her colloquial talents, that he attended the ladies on their return to Clifton, and from that time continued to cultivate the regard of his new acquaintance with such assiduous attention, that she soon received from him the familiar and endearing title of Sister Ann."

This was shortly after Mr. Newton's first visit to Olney since his removal from that cure—a visit which Cowper had greatly enjoyed during its continuance, but which, like all such visits, left an aching in his heart. "My sensations at your departure," he says to him,⁴¹ "were far from pleasant, and Mrs. Unwin suffered more upon the occasion than when you first took leave of Olney. When we shall meet again, and in what circumstances, or whether we shall meet or not, is an event to be found no where but in that volume of Providence which belongs to the current year, and will not be understood till it is accomplished. This I know, that your visit was most agreeable here. It was so even to me, who, though I live in the midst of many agreeables, am but little sensible of their charms. But when you came, I determined, as much as possible, to be deaf to the suggestions of despair; that if I could contribute but little to the pleasure of the opportunity, I might not dash it with unseasonable melancholy, and, like an instrument with a broken string, interrupt the harmony of the concert."

In the same letter which began in this melancholy strain, Cowper mentioned Lady Austen's first visit, and that they had returned it; and he described her to his friend. "She is a lively, agreeable woman; has seen much of the world, and accounts it a great simpleton, as it is. She laughs and

⁴¹ July 7.

makes laugh ; and keeps up a conversation without seeming to labor at it. To Mr. Unwin he says,⁴² "She is a most agreeable woman, and has fallen in love with your mother and me ; inasmuch, that I do not know but she may settle at Olney. Yesterday sennight we all dined together in the *Spinnie* — a most delightful retirement, belonging to Mrs. Throckmorton of Weston. Lady Austen's lackey, and a lad that waits on me in the garden, drove a wheelbarrow full of eatables and drinkables to the scene of our *fête champêtre*. A board, laid over the top of the wheelbarrow, served us for a table ; our dining-room was a root-house, lined with moss and ivy. At six o'clock, the servants, who had dined under the great elm upon the ground, at a little distance, boiled the kettle, and the said wheelbarrow served us for a tea-table. We then took a walk into the wilderness, about half a mile off, and were at home again a little after eight, having spent the day together from noon till evening, without one cross occurrence, or the least weariness of each other — a happiness few parties of pleasure can boast of."

It was not long before an arrangement grew out of this new friendship, which was thus communicated to Mr. Newton : — "Here is a new scene opening, which, whether it perform what it promises or not, will add fresh plumes to the wings of time ; at least while it continues to be a subject of contemplation. If the project take effect, a thousand varieties will attend the change it will make in our situation at Olney. If not, it will serve, however, to speculate and converse upon, and steal away many hours, by engaging our attention, before it be entirely dropped. Lady Austen, very desirous of retirement, especially of a retirement near her sister, an admirer of Mr. Scott as a preacher, and of your two humble servants now in the greenhouse, as the most agreeable creatures in the world, is at present determined to settle here. That part of our great building which is at present occupied by Dick Coleman, his wife, child, and a thousand rats, is the corner of the world she chooses, above all others, as the place of her future residence. Next spring twelvemonth she begins to repair and beautify, and

⁴² July 22.

the following winter (by which time the lease of her house in town will determine) she intends to take possession. I am highly pleased with the plan, upon Mrs. Unwin's account, who, since Mrs. Newton's departure, is destitute of all female connection, and has not, in any emergency, a woman to speak to. Mrs. Scott is indeed in the neighborhood, and an excellent person, but always engaged by a close attention to her family, and no more than ourselves a lover of visiting. But these things are all at present in the clouds. Two years must intervene,—and in two years not only this project, but all the projects in Europe, may be disconcerted.”⁴³

Cowper's spirits received a wholesome impulse when the solitude, or rather (as he termed it) the duality of their condition at Olney seemed drawing to a conclusion. He said to Mr. Unwin that it had in his eyes “strong marks of providential interposition. A female friend, and one who bids fair to prove herself worthy of the appellation, comes recommended by a variety of considerations to such a place as Olney. Since Mr. Newton went, and till this lady came, there was not in the kingdom a retirement more absolutely such than ours. We did not want company, but when it came, we found it agreeable. A person that has seen much of the world, and understands it well, has high spirits, a lively fancy, and great readiness of conversation, introduces a sprightliness into such a scene as this, which, if it was peaceful before, is not the worse for being a little enlivened. In case of illness, too, to which all are liable, it was rather a gloomy prospect, if we allowed ourselves to advert to it, that there was hardly a woman in the place from whom it would have been reasonable to have expected either comfort or assistance. The present curate's wife is a valuable person, but has a family of her own, and though a neighbor, is not a very near one. But if this plan is effected, we shall be in a manner one family, and I suppose never pass a day without some intercourse with each other.”⁴⁴

Lady Austen returned to town in October. Cowper told her to expect a visit there from Mr. Unwin — “an en-

⁴³ Aug. 21.

⁴⁴ Aug. 25.

terprise," said he to his friend, "which you may engage in with the more alacrity, because, as she loves any thing that has any connection with your mother, she is sure to feel a sufficient partiality for her son. She has many features in her character which you will admire; but one in particular, on account of the rarity of it, will engage your attention and esteem. She has a degree of gratitude in her composition, so quick a sense of obligation as is hardly to be found in any rank of life; and, if report says true, is scarce indeed in the superior. Discover but a wish to please her, and she never forgets it; not only thanks you, but the tears will start into her eyes at the recollection of the smallest service. With these fine feelings, she has the most, and the most harmless, vivacity you can imagine. In short, she is — what you will find her to be upon half an hour's conversation with her."⁴⁵

Cowper addressed a poetical epistle to her in London, in the manner of his old associate, poor Lloyd.

DEAR ANNA, between friend and friend,
Prose answers every common end;
Serves in a plain and homely way,
To express th' occurrence of the day;
Our health, the weather, and the news;
What walks we take, what books we choose;
And all the floating thoughts we find
Upon the surface of the mind.

But when a poet takes the pen,
Far more alive than other men,
He feels a gentle tingling come
Down to his finger⁴⁶ and his thumb,
Derived from nature's noblest part,
The centre of a glowing⁴⁶ heart:
And this is what the world, who knows
No flights above the pitch of prose,
His more sublime vagaries slighting,
Denominates an itch for writing.

⁴⁵ Sept. 26.

⁴⁶ Perhaps Cowper remembered John Bunyan's lines, in which that glorious tinker describes the origin of his Pilgrim's Progress:—

It came from mine own heart, so to my head,
And thence into my fingers trickled;
Thence to my pen, from whence immediately
On paper I did dribble it daintily.

No wonder I, who scribble rhyme
 To catch the triflers of the time,
 And tell them truths divine and clear,
 Which, couched in prose, they will not hear;
 Who labor hard to allure and draw
 The loiterers I never saw, —
 Should feel that itching, and that tingling,
 With all my purpose intermingling,
 To your intrinsic merit true,
 When called t' address myself to you.

Mysterious are His ways, whose power
 Brings forth that unexpected hour,
 When minds, that never met before,
 Shall meet, unite, and part no more:
 It is th' allotment of the skies,
 The hand of the supremely Wise,
 That guides and governs our affections,
 And plans and orders our connections;
 Directs us in our distant road,
 And marks the bounds of our abode.
 Thus we were settled when you found us,
 Peasants and children all around us,
 Not dreaming of so dear a friend
 Deep in the abyss of Silver-End.⁴⁷
 Thus Martha — e'en against her will —
 Perched on the top of yonder hill;
 And you — though you must needs prefer
 The fairer scenes of sweet Sancerre —⁴⁸
 Are come from distant Loire, to choose
 A cottage on the banks of Ouse.
 This page of Providence, quite new,
 And now just opening to our view,
 Employs our present thoughts and pains
 To guess, and spell, what it contains:
 But day by day, and year by year,
 Will make the dark enigma clear;
 And furnish us, perhaps, at last,
 Like other scenes already past,
 With proof, that we, and our affairs,
 Are part of a Jehovah's cares;
 For God unfolds, by slow degrees,
 The purport of his deep decrees;
 Sheds every hour a clearer light
 In aid of our defective sight;

⁴⁷ An obscure part of Olney, adjoining to the residence of Cowper, which faced the market-place.

⁴⁸ Lady Austen's residence in France.

And spreads, at length, before the soul
A beautiful and perfect whole,
Which busy man's inventive brain
Toils to anticipate in vain.

Say, Anna, had you never known
The beauties of a rose full blown,
Could you, though luminous your eye,
By looking on the bud, descry,
Or guess, with a prophetic power,
The future splendor of the flower?
Just so, the Omnipotent, who turns
The system of a world's concerns,
From mere minutiae can educe
Events of most important use,
And bid a dawning sky display
The blaze of a meridian day.
The works of man tend, one and all,
As needs they must, from great to small;
And vanity absorbs at length
The monuments of human strength.
But who can tell how vast the plan
Which this day's incident began?
Too small, perhaps, the slight occasion
For our dim-sighted observation;
It passed unnoticed, as the bird
That cleaves the yielding air unheard;
And yet may prove, when understood,
A harbinger of endless good.

Not that I deem, or mean to call,
Friendship, a blessing cheap, or small;
But merely to remark, that ours,
Like some of nature's sweetest flowers,
Rose from a seed of tiny size,
That seemed to promise no such prize:
A transient visit intervening,
And made almost without a meaning,
(Hardly the effect of inclination,
Much less of pleasing expectation)
Produced a friendship, then begun,
That has cemented us in one;
And placed it in our power to prove,
By long fidelity and love,
That Solomon has wisely spoken —
"A threefold cord is not soon broken."

"In this interesting poem," says Hayley, "the author expresses a lively and devout presage of the superior pro-

ductions that were to arise, in the process of time, from a friendship so unexpected and so pleasing; but he does not seem to have been aware, in the slightest degree, of the evident dangers that must naturally attend an intimacy so very close, yet perfectly innocent, between a poet and two ladies, who, with very different mental powers, had each reason to flatter herself that she could agreeably promote the studies, and animate the fancy of this fascinating bard."

Considering the good sense and the principles of all parties, and, moreover, the age of two of them, (Cowper being then fifty, and Mrs. Unwin seven years older,) the danger will not be deemed so evident as Hayley considered it to have been, — after the event. Every circumstance is interesting in the story of a friendship which produced such consequences in our literature; for if Cowper had never known Lady Austen, it may well be doubted whether he would ever have attained that popularity and that fame which he will hold as long as English shall continue to be the language of a civilized people. The friendship which promised so fairly had nearly been nipped in the bud.

A few weeks after the date of his poetical epistle to Lady Austen, Cowper wrote thus to Mr. Unwin:⁴⁹ "I have a piece of secret history to communicate, which I would have imparted sooner, but that I thought it possible there might be no occasion to mention it at all. When persons for whom I have felt a friendship disappoint and mortify me by their conduct, or act unjustly towards me, though I no longer esteem them friends, I still feel that tenderness for their character, that I would conceal the blemish if I could. But in making known the following anecdote to you, I run no risk of a publication, assured that when I have once enjoined you secrecy, you will observe it. My letters have already apprized you of that close and intimate connection that took place between the lady you visited in Queen Anne Street and us. Nothing could be more promising, though sudden in the commencement. She treated us with as much unreservedness of communication, as if we had been born in the same house, and educated together. At her departure, she herself proposed a correspondence; and because writing

⁴⁹ Feb. 9, 1782.

does not agree with your mother, proposed a correspondence with me. This sort of intercourse had not been long maintained, before I discovered, by some slight intimation of it, that she had conceived displeasure at something I had written, though I cannot now recollect it. Conscious of none but the most upright and inoffensive intentions, I yet apologized for the passage in question, and the flaw was healed again. Our correspondence, after this, proceeded smoothly for a considerable time; but at length, having had repeated occasion to observe that she expressed a sort of romantic idea of our merits, and built such expectations of felicity upon our friendship, as we were sure that nothing human could possibly answer, I wrote to remind her that we were mortal, to recommend it to her not to think more highly of us than the subject would warrant; and intimating, that when we embellish a creature with colors taken from our own fancy, and, so adorned, admire and praise it beyond its real merits, we make it an idol, and have nothing to expect in the end but that it will deceive our hopes, and that we shall derive nothing from it but a painful conviction of our error. Your mother heard me read the letter; she read it herself, and honored it with her warm approbation. But it gave mortal offence. It received, indeed, an answer, but such a one as I could by no means reply to; and thus ended (for it is impossible it should ever be renewed) a friendship that bade fair to be lasting, — being formed with a woman whose seeming stability of temper, whose knowledge of the world, and great experience of its folly, but above all, whose sense of religion and seriousness of mind, (for with all that gayety she is a great thinker,) induced us both, in spite of that cautious reserve that marks our character, to trust her, to love and value her, and to open our hearts for her reception. It may be necessary to add, that by her own desire I wrote to her under the assumed relation of a brother, and she to me as a sister — *ceu fumus in auras*. — We have recovered from the concern we suffered on account of the *fracas* above mentioned, though for some days it made us unhappy. Not knowing but that she might possibly become sensible in a few days that she had acted hastily and unreasonably, and renew the

correspondence herself, I could not in justice apprise you of this quarrel sooner; but some weeks having passed without any proposals of accommodation, I am now persuaded that none are intended, and in justice to you, am obliged to caution you against a repetition of your visit."

Cowper, however, soon had to communicate that the advances of which he despaired had been made. "Having," he says, "unfolded to you an account of the *fracas* between us and Lady Austen, it is necessary that you should be made acquainted with every event that bears any relation to that incident. The day before yesterday she sent us by her brother-in-law, Mr. Jones, three pair of worked ruffles, with advice that I should soon receive a fourth. I knew they were begun before we quarrelled. I begged Mr. Jones to tell her, when he wrote next, how much I thought myself obliged; and gave him to understand that I should make her a very inadequate, though the only return in my power, by laying my volume at her feet: this likewise she had previous reason given her to expect. Thus stands the affair at present. Whether any thing in the shape of a reconciliation is to take place hereafter, I know not; but this I know, that when an amicable freedom of intercourse, and that unreserved confidence which belongs only to true friendship has been once unrooted, plant it again with what care you may, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to make it grow. The fear of giving offence to a temper too apt to take it, is unfavorable to that comfort we propose to ourselves even in our ordinary connections, but absolutely incompatible with the pleasures of real friendship. She is to spend the summer in our neighborhood. Lady —— and Miss —— are to be of the party; the former a dissipated woman of fashion, and the latter a haughty beauty. Retirement is our passion and our delight. It is in still life alone we look for that measure of happiness we can rationally expect below. What have we to do, therefore, with characters like these? Shall we go to the dancing-school again? Shall we cast off the simplicity of our plain and artless demeanor, to learn, and not in a youthful day neither, the manners of those whose manners at the best are their only recommendation, and yet can in reality recommend them

to none but to people like themselves? This would be folly which nothing but necessity could excuse, and in our case no such necessity can possibly obtain. We will not go into the world ; and if the world would come to us, we must give it the French answer — *Monsieur et Madame ne sont pas visibles.*" ⁵⁰

But it depended upon the lady whether or not this intercourse should be renewed ; and this was felt at Olney. "We are far," says Cowper, "from wishing a renewal of the connection we have lately talked about. We did, indeed, find it in a certain way an agreeable one, while that lady continued in the country ; yet not altogether compatible with our favorite plan — with that silent retirement in which we have spent so many years, and in which we wish to spend what are yet before us. She is exceedingly sensible, has great quickness of parts, and an uncommon fluency of expression ; but her vivacity was sometimes too much for us ; occasionally, perhaps, it might refresh and revive us, but it more frequently exhausted us, neither your mother nor I being in that respect at all a match for her. But after all, it does not entirely depend upon us whether our former intimacy shall take place again or not ; or rather, whether we shall attempt to cultivate it, or give it over, as we are most inclined to do, in despair. I suspect a little, by her sending the ruffles, and by the terms in which she spoke of us to you, that some overtures on her part are to be looked for. Should this happen, however we may wish to be reserved, we must not be rude ; but I can answer for us both, that we shall enter into the connection again with great reluctance, not hoping for any better fruit of it than it has already produced. If you thought she fell short of the description I gave of her, I still think, however, that it was not a partial one, and that it did not make too favorable a representation of her character. You *must* have seen her to disadvantage ; a consciousness of a quarrel so recent, and in which she had expressed herself with a warmth that she knew must have affronted and shocked us both, must unavoidably have produced its effect upon her behavior, which, though it could not be awkward, must have been in some degree unnatural ;

her attention being necessarily pretty much engrossed by a recollection of what had passed between us. I would by no means have hazarded you into her company, if I had not been sure that she would treat you with politeness, and almost persuaded that she would soon see the unreasonableness of her conduct, and make a suitable apology." ⁵¹

The reconciliation, as might now be expected,⁵² easily took place, and the parties were soon as happy in each other's society as before. Lady Austen's fashionable friends occasioned no embarrassment; they seemed to have preferred some more fashionable place for summering in, for they are not again spoken of. The plan of fitting up that wing of the house which was held in joint occupancy by Dick Coleman and the rats was found impracticable; but an arrange-

⁵¹ March 7, 1782.

⁵² To this occasion the extract must be referred, which Hayley has printed from an undated letter to Mr. Unwin, wherein Cowper says, "We are reconciled. She (Lady Austen) seized the first opportunity to embrace your mother with tears of the tenderest affection. We were all a little awkward at first, but now are as easy as ever." Hayley says, immediately before he introduces the passage, "In the whole course of this work I have endeavored to recollect, on every doubtful occasion, the feelings of Cowper; and made it a rule to reject whatever my perfect intimacy with those feelings could lead me to suppose the spirit of the departed poet might wish me to lay aside as unfit for publication. I consider an editor as guilty of the basest injury to the dead, who admits into the posthumous volumes of an author whom he professes to love and admire, any composition which his own conscience informs him *that author*, if he could speak from the tomb, would direct him to suppress. On this principle I have declined to print some letters, which entered, more than I think the public ought to enter, into the history of a trifling feminine discord, that disturbed the perfect harmony of the happy trio at Olney when Lady Austen and Mrs. Unwin were the united inspirers of the poet."

The rule which Hayley prescribed to himself is what every biographer, circumstanced as he was, ought to observe, but I think it was, in this instance, applicable only while Lady Austen was living, if he alludes to the foresaid interruption of their friendship at this time; and that when he spoke of "a trifling feminine discord," the words imply something more discreditable to two such women than the affair itself can be deemed. Lady Austen was evidently one of those persons who are too sensitive for their own happiness; and it may be collected from Cowper's account, that in warning her against expecting and exacting too much from those she loved, he fell into a strain so unlike that of his conversation and of his former letters, that she was surprised at it; and the same cause which seems to have suspended Lady Hesketh's correspondence with a kinsman whom she loved so dearly, provoked from her a hasty and perhaps a tart reply.

ment was made at the vicarage, and preparations were made for her entering upon this abode in the autumn.

During the short interruption of their friendship, Cowper happily had his mind much occupied with the business of the press. The task of correcting he was never weary of, being of opinion "that the secret of almost all good writing, especially in verse, is to touch and retouch; though some writers boast of negligence, and others would be ashamed to show their foul copies."⁵³ "A lapidary," he says, "I suppose, accounts it a laborious part of his business to rub away the roughness of the stone; but it is my amusement; and if, after all the polishing I can give it, it discovers some little lustre, I think myself well rewarded for my pains."⁵⁴ It was only upon his poems that Cowper bestowed this labor. His letters were written as easily as they appear to have been; they would not otherwise have been inimitable. It is certain that he made no "foul copies" of them; they are in a clear, beautiful, running hand, and it is rarely that an erasure occurs in them, or the slightest alteration of phrase.

Mr. Newton suggested that a copy of the forthcoming volume should be sent to Dr. Johnson, and Cowper perfectly acquiesced in the propriety, "though I well know," said he, "that one of his pointed sarcasms, if he should happen to be displeased, would soon find its way into all companies, and spoil the sale. Whatever faults I may be chargeable with as a poet, I cannot accuse myself of negligence. I never suffer a line to pass till I have made it as good as I can; and though my doctrines may offend this king of critics, he will not, I flatter myself, be disgusted by slovenly inaccuracy, either in the numbers, rhymes, or language. Let the rest take its chance. It is possible he may be pleased; and if he should, I shall have engaged on my side one of the best trumpeters in the kingdom. Let him only speak as favorably of me as he has spoken of Sir Richard Blackmore, (who, though he shines in his poem called *Creation*, has written more absurdities in verse than any writer of our country,) and my success will be secured."⁵⁵

⁵³ To Mr. Unwin, July 2, 1780. ⁵⁴ Aug. 9, 1780. ⁵⁵ Sept. 18, 1781.

"I think it would be well to send it in our joint names, accompanied with a handsome card, such a one as you will know how to fabricate, and such as may predispose him to a favorable perusal of the book, by coaxing him into a good temper; for he is a great bear, with all his learning and penetration."⁵⁶

Mr. Newton, however, changed his mind upon this point, and Cowper, who, like all good-natured men, was easily persuaded in trifles, agreed with him again, and seemed to feel that there would be an unfitness in appearing to wish the critical opinion of one whose taste was in some important points opposed to his own. "He finds fault," says Cowper, "too often like a man that, having sought it very industriously, is at last obliged to stick it on a pin's point, and look at it through a microscope." He was well pleased with a proposal that Mr. Newton's name should appear in the title-page as editor, saying, "I do not care under how many names you appear in a book that calls me author." A friend, however, of Mr. Newton was of opinion that he had already taken too much part in it, and that his preface, instead of serving the volume which introduced, would injuriously affect the sale. Upon this Cowper observed, "Mr. Bates, without intending it, has passed a severer censure upon the modern world of readers, than any that can be found in my volume. If they are so merrily disposed, in the midst of a thousand calamities, that they will not deign to read a preface of three or four pages, because the purport of it is serious, they are far gone indeed, and in the last stage of a frenzy, such as I suppose has prevailed in all nations that have been exemplarily punished, just before the infliction of the sentence. But though he lives in the world he has so ill an opinion of, and ought therefore to know it better than I, who have no intercourse with it at all, I am willing to hope that he may be mistaken. Curiosity is a universal passion. There are few people who think a book worth their reading, but feel a desire to know something about the writer of it. This desire will naturally lead them to peep into the preface, where they will soon find that a little perseverance will furnish them

with some information on the subject. If, therefore, your preface finds no readers, I shall take it for granted that it is because the book itself is accounted not worth their notice. Be that as it may, it is quite sufficient that I have played the antic myself for their diversion ; and that, in a state of dejection such as they are absolute strangers to, I have sometimes put on an air of cheerfulness and vivacity, to which I myself am in reality a stranger, for the sake of winning their attention to more useful matter. I cannot endure the thought for a moment, that you should descend to my level on the occasion, and court their favor in a style not more unsuitable to your function, than to the constant and consistent strain of your whole character and conduct. No — let the preface stand. I cannot mend it. I could easily make a jest of it, but it is better as it is.”⁵⁷

When the preface was printed, the publisher, who knew Mr. Newton well and esteemed him highly, but was likely to consult with persons of a widely different school, took fright at it, and wrote to Cowper, expressing his anxious wish that it might be cancelled. He said that though it would serve to recommend the volume to the religious, it would disgust the profane ; that in reality there was no need of a preface at all ; and that if Cowper would consent to have it withdrawn, he would undertake to manage that matter with the writer. Cowper, as he had found Johnson “ a very judicious man on other occasions,” was willing that he should determine for him upon this, thinking it best to abide by the judgment of one “ who by his occupation was bound to understand what would promote the sale of a book, and what would hinder it.” “ What course he determines upon,” said he to Mr. Newton, “ I do not know, nor am I at all anxious about it. It is impossible for me, however, to be so insensible of your kindness in writing the preface, as not to be desirous of defying all contingencies, rather than entertain a wish to suppress it. It will do me honor in the eyes of those whose good opinion is indeed an honor, and if it hurts me in the estimation of others, I cannot help it ; the fault is neither yours nor mine ; but theirs. If a min-

⁵⁷ To Mr. Newton, Oct. 22, 1781.

ster's is a more splendid character than a poet's, (and I think nobody that understands their value can hesitate in deciding that question,) then undoubtedly the advantage of having our names united in the same volume is all on my side." ⁵⁸

Mr. Newton of course consented to the withdrawal, and accordingly it was withdrawn, "not for containing any thing offensively peculiar, but as being thought too pious for a world that grew more foolish and more careless, as it grew older." Yet Johnson might have considered that Mr. Newton's recommendation would bespeak for the volume a good reception among what is called the religious public, and that among the profane, none who could relish the poems would be deterred by the preface from reading them; that if the account which it gave of the author should fail to awaken old feelings in the literary circle wherein he had formerly moved, it would be read with interest by many to whom his name was unknown; that a favorable curiosity might be excited by it in those who had hearts to feel; and that such an introduction was itself a novelty which was likely to attract attention.

CHAPTER X.

COWPER'S STATE OF MIND. SIMON BROWNE. RECEPTION OF HIS FIRST VOLUME. THE VALEDICTION. STORY OF JOHN GILPIN, TOLD HIM BY LADY AUSTEN. THE DISTRESSED TRAVELLERS. THE TASK. MR. NEWTON'S VISIT TO OLNEY. TERMINATION OF THE FRIENDSHIP WITH LADY AUSTEN. MADAME GUYON. INTRODUCTION TO THE THROCKMORTON FAMILY.

MR. NEWTON had, in the suppressed Preface, hinted at his friend's malady; "a hope," he said, "that the God whom he served would support him under his affliction, and

at length vouchsafe him a happy deliverance, never forsook me. The desirable crisis, I trust, is now nearly approaching; the dawn, the presage of returning day, is already arrived."

"Your sentiments with respect to me," said Cowper, "are exactly Mrs. Unwin's. She, like you, is perfectly sure of my deliverance, and often tells me so. I make but one answer, and sometimes none at all. That answer gives *her* no pleasure, and would give *you* as little; therefore, at this time, I suppress it. It is better on every account, that they who interest themselves so deeply in that event, should believe the certainty of it, than that they should not. It is a comfort to *them* at least, if it is none to me; and as I could not if I would, so neither would I if I could deprive them of it."¹ Gloomy as this language is, a blacker melancholy sometimes was manifested in his letters,—as when he said to Mr. Newton, "I would, no more than you, wish to live such a life over again, but for one reason:—he that is carried to execution, though through the roughest road, when he arrives at the destined spot, would be glad, notwithstanding the many jolts he met with, to repeat his journey."² Again, "I do not at all doubt the truth of what you say, when you complain of that crowd of trifling thoughts that pesters you without ceasing; but then you always have a serious thought standing at the door of your imagination, like a justice of peace with the riot act in his hand, ready to read it and disperse the mob. Here lies the difference between you and me. My thoughts are clad in a sober livery, for the most part as grave as that of a bishop's servant's; they turn, too, upon spiritual subjects; but the tallest fellow, and the loudest amongst them all, is he who is continually crying with a loud voice, *Actum est de te; periisti!* You wish for more attention, I for less. Dissipation itself would be welcome to me, so it were not a vicious one; but however earnestly invited, it is coy, and keeps at a distance."³

To reason with Cowper upon his own state of mind, perfectly reasonable as he was upon all other subjects, was too

¹ Dec. 21, 1780.

² Feb. 18, 1781.

³ Aug. 21, 1781.

evidently hopeless. Mr. Newton thought it might be of some avail if he could induce him to contemplate something resembling it in another person; and with this view he called his attention to the remarkable case of Simon Browne. This person, who was born about the year 1680, at Shepton Mallet in Somersetshire, and in 1716 had been chosen minister of the Dissenters' Meeting in the Old Jewry, ("one of the most respectable among the Dissenters,") lost, in the year 1723, his wife and only son, and fell into a deep melancholy, which ended in a settled persuasion that "he had fallen under the sensible displeasure of God, who had caused his rational soul gradually to perish, and left him only an animal life, in common with brutes; so that, though he retained the faculty of speaking in a manner that appeared rational to others, he had all the while no more notion of what he said than a parrot,—being utterly divested of consciousness. It was therefore," he said, "profane for him to pray, and incongruous to be present at the prayers of others." Resigning his ministry under this delusion, he retired to his native place, and there amused himself with translating portions of the Greek and Latin poets into English verse, and writing little pieces for the use of children. Then he undertook to compile a dictionary, which, he observed, was doing nothing that required a reasonable soul; but towards the close of his life, he engaged earnestly in theological subjects, and published "A sober and charitable Disquisition concerning the Importance of the Trinity;" "A fit Rebuke to a ludicrous Infidel, in Reply to one of Woolston's Discourses," and "A Defence of the Religion of Nature and of the Christian Revelation, in answer to Tindal's Christianity as old as the Creation." All these are said to be "well reasoned and clearly written pieces," and the latter "was allowed to be the best which that controversy produced." He had prepared a Dedication for this to Queen Caroline, as of all extraordinary things which had been tendered to her royal hands, the chief; not in itself, "but on account of the author, who, said he, is the first being of the kind, and yet without a name. He was once a man, and of some little name, but of no worth, as his present unparalleled case makes but too manifest; for

by the immediate hand of an avenging God, his very thinking substance has for more than seven years been continually wasting away, till it is wholly perished out of him, if it be not utterly gone to nothing. None, no not the least remembrance of its very ruins remains ; not the shadow of an idea is left ; nor any sense that so much as one single one, perfect or imperfect, whole or diminished, ever did appear to a mind within him, or was perceived by it.

"Such a present," he continued, "from such a thing, however worthless in itself, may not be wholly unacceptable to your majesty, the author being such as history cannot parallel. And if the fact (which is real, and no fiction, nor wrong conceit) obtain credit, it must be recorded as the most memorable, and, indeed, astonishing event in the reign of George II., that a tract composed by such a thing was presented to the illustrious Caroline, his royal consort, needs not be added ; fame, if I am not misinformed, will tell that with pleasure to all succeeding times. — Such a case will certainly strike your majesty with astonishment, and may raise that commiseration in your royal breast, which he has in vain endeavored to excite in those of his friends, who, by the most unreasonable and ill-founded conceit in the world, have imagined that a thinking being could, for seven years together, live a stranger to its own powers, exercises, operations, and state ; and to what the great God has been doing in it, and to it."

The object of the Dedication was to request the queen's prayers in her "most retired address to the King of kings, that the reign of her beloved consort might be renowned to all posterity by the recovery of a soul in the utmost ruin, and restoration of one utterly lost at present amongst men ;" and to express a hope that her majesty would recommend his case to the piety and prayers of all the truly devout who had the honor to be known to her : "many such," he says, "doubtless there are, though courts are not usually the places where the devout resort, or where devotion reigns. And it is not improbable that multitudes of the pious throughout the land may take a case to heart, that under your majesty's patronage comes thus recommended. Could such a favor as his restoration be obtained from Heaven by

the prayers of your majesty, with what a transport of gratitude would the recovered being throw himself at your majesty's feet, and, adoring the divine power and grace, profess himself, madam, your majesty's most obliged and dutiful servant."

His friends found means to suppress this extraordinary epistle, "wisely considering," says Hawkesworth, "that a book to which it should be prefixed would certainly be condemned without examination; for who would have required stronger evidence of its inutility than that the author appeared by his dedication to be mad?" A copy, however, was made, and was transmitted, more than twenty years afterwards, to Dr. Hawkesworth, for insertion in the *Adventurer*,⁴ "as a literary curiosity, which was in danger of being lost for want of a repository wherein it might be preserved." "Of all the recorded delusions," says Dr. Aikin, "to which the human mind is subjected, none, perhaps, is more remarkable than this, which apparently could not be put into a form of words for description without demonstratively proving its fallacy." Mr. Newton seems to have hoped that Cowper could not fail to perceive this, and that in detecting a plain delusion in a case which in some respects strikingly resembled his own, he might be led to suspect himself of being in like manner self-deluded. Any such hope was destroyed by Cowper's reply.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

March 14, 1782.

I was not unacquainted with Mr. Browne's extraordinary case, before you favored me with his letter and his intended dedication to the queen, though I am obliged to you for a sight of those two curiosities, which I do not recollect to have ever seen till you sent them. I could, however, were it not a subject that would make us all melancholy, point out to you some essential differences between his state of mind and my own, which would prove mine to be by far the most deplorable of the two. I suppose no man would despair, if he did not apprehend something singular in the circumstances of his own story, something that discriminates

it from that of every other man, and that induces despair as an inevitable consequence. You may encounter his unhappy persuasion with as many instances as you please, of persons who, like him, having renounced all hope, were yet restored; and may thence infer that he, like them, shall meet with a season of restoration; but it is in vain. Every such individual accounts himself an exception to all rules, and therefore the blessed reverse, that others have experienced, affords no ground of comfortable expectation to *him*. But you will say, it is reasonable to conclude that as all your predecessors in this vale of misery and horror have found themselves delightfully disappointed at last, so will you:—I grant the reasonableness of it; it would be sinful, perhaps, because uncharitable, to reason otherwise; but an argument, hypothetical in its nature, however rationally conducted, may lead to a false conclusion; and in this instance, so will yours. But I forbear. For the cause above mentioned, I will say no more, though it is a subject on which I could write more than the mail would carry. I must deal with you as I deal with poor Mrs. Unwin, in all our disputes about it, cutting all controversy short by an appeal to the event.

W. C.

Simon Browne died⁵ under this delusion, soon after his dedication was written, in the fifty-second year of his age, in consequence of diseases brought upon him by his sedentary life and deranged spirits. The case resembled Cowper's, in his refusing to join in any act of worship,⁶ public or private, in his feeling at first strong temptations to suicide, and afterwards becoming calm and composed, "even cheerful when not thinking of his own condition," and in his re-

⁵ 1732.

⁶ "Being once importuned to say grace at the table of a friend, he excused himself many times; but the request being still repeated, and the company kept standing, he discovered evident tokens of distress; and after some irresolute gestures and hesitation, expressed with great fervor this ejaculation:—'Most merciful and Almighty God, let thy Spirit, which moved upon the face of the waters when there was no light, descend upon me; that from this darkness there may rise up a man to praise Thee!'"—*Adventurer*, No. 88.

taining his intellectual faculties in full vigor. There was this difference, that Browne, while he fancied himself deprived of all mental power, engaged willingly in work which required close reasoning; and of this Cowper was afraid. "I cannot," said he, "bear much thinking. The meshes of that fine net-work, the brain, are composed of such mere spinners' threads in me, that when a long thought finds its way into them, it buzzes, and twangs, and bustles about at such a rate as seems to threaten the whole contexture."⁷ A certain degree of occupation he found agreeable and salutary; but he understood his own condition well enough to avoid any thing which required laborious thought, or would produce in himself any strong and painful emotion. To Mr. Newton (the correspondent to whom he wrote most gravely) he says, "I can compare this mind of mine to nothing that resembles it more than to a board that is under the carpenter's plane, (I mean, while I am writing to you;) the shavings are my uppermost thoughts; after a few strokes of the tool, it acquires a new surface: this again, upon a repetition of his task, he takes off, and a new surface still succeeds. Whether the shavings of the present day will be worth your acceptance, I know not. I am unfortunately made neither of cedar nor mahogany, but *truncus ficulnus*, *inutile lignum*; consequently, though I should be planed till I am as thin as a wafer, it will be but rubbish to the last."⁸

Easterly winds, which are proverbially neither good for man nor beast, he thought unfavorable to him in all his occupations, especially that of writing. Disturbed sleep had the same effect. "Such nights," said he, "as I frequently spend, are but a miserable prelude to the succeeding day, and indispose me above all things to the business of writing; yet with a pen in my hand, if I am able to write at all, I find myself gradually relieved; and as I am glad of any employment that may serve to engage my attention, so especially I am pleased with an opportunity of conversing with you, though it be but upon paper. This occupation above all others assists me in that self-deception

⁷ To Mr. Newton, July 12, 1780.

⁸ June 23, 1780.

to which I am indebted for all the little comfort I enjoy ; things seem to be as they were, and I almost forget that they never can be so again.”⁹

He believed that the moon affected him, and that there was no human being who did not more or less experience its effects. If she had any *crabs* among her acquaintance, he told one of his friends, she would, if she attended to them, find them always much more peevish and ill-tempered at the new and full moon than at any other time ; for he was sure it influenced the temper as well as the brain, when either was at all disordered. Upon his own temper it had no effect, for that was equally sweet at all times, but it had a very perceptible one upon his spirits ; during the full moon, he was observed to be always low, and “ quite different to what he was at any other season.”¹⁰ It is possible that he may have been thus affected, because he expected to be so ; but the fact is certain, whether it be considered as the effect of imagination alone, or as a case in proof of the old opinion concerning the influence of the moon upon lunatics.

The effect was upon his spirits, not upon his intellect, or temper ; and the degree of apprehension with which he looked to the full of the moon, was not more than that wherewith he regarded an east wind. But he dreaded the return of that month in which his former seizures had occurred ; and his friends, knowing this, dreaded it for him. Writing to Mr. Newton, he says, “ When January returns, you have your feelings concerning me, and such as prove the faithfulness of your friendship. I have mine also concerning myself, but they are of a cast different from yours. Yours have a mixture of sympathy and tender solicitude, which makes them, perhaps, not altogether unpleasant. Mine, on the contrary, are of an unmixed nature, and consist simply, and merely, of the most alarming apprehensions. Twice has that month returned upon me, accompanied by such horrors as I have no reason to suppose ever made part of the experience of any other man. I accordingly look

⁹ To Mrs. Newton, June, 1780.

¹⁰ Lady Hesketh's Anecdotes, p. 61, 62.

forward to it, and meet it, with a dread not to be imagined. I number the nights as they pass, and in the morning, bless myself that another night is gone, and no harm has happened. This may argue, perhaps, some imbecility of mind, and no small degree of it ; but it is natural, I believe, and so natural as to be necessary and unavoidable. I know that God is not governed by secondary causes, in any of his operations ; and that, on the contrary, they are all so many agents, in his hand, which strike only when he bids them. I know, consequently, that one month is as dangerous to me as another ; and that in the middle of summer, at noon-day, and in the clear sunbine, I am, in reality, unless guarded by him, as much exposed, as when fast asleep at midnight, and in midwinter. But we are not always the wiser for our knowledge, and I can no more avail myself of mine, than if it were in the head of another man, and not in my own. I have heard of bodily aches and ails that have been particularly troublesome when the season returned in which the hurt that occasioned them was received. The mind, I believe, (with my own, however, I am sure it is so,) is liable to similar periodical affection. But February is come ; January, my terror, is passed ; and some shades of the gloom that attended his presence have passed with him. I look forward with a little cheerfulness to the buds and the leaves that will soon appear, and say to myself, Till they turn yellow I will make myself easy. The year *will* go round, and January *will* approach. I *shall* tremble again, and I know it ; but in the mean time, I will be as comfortable as I can. Thus, in respect of peace of mind, such as it is that I enjoy, I subsist, as the poor are vulgarly said to do, from hand to mouth ; and, of a Christian, such as you once knew me, am, by a strange transformation, become an Epicurean philosopher, bearing this motto on my mind, — *Quid sit futurum cras, fuge querere*.¹¹

When Cowper commenced author, he fancied that as spring came on, what with walking and out-of-door avocations, he should find little leisure for the pen ; in winter, perhaps, he might assume it again, but his appetite for fame he thought was not keen enough to combat with his

¹¹ Feb. 5, 1790.

love of fine weather, his love of indolence, and his love of gardening employments.¹² His inclination when he began to write verses after his recovery, and without any view to publication, had been to indulge in melancholy strains. At that time, speaking of the midsummer heat to Mr. Unwin, who had gone to the coast, he said to him, "We envy you your sea-breezes. In the garden we feel nothing but the reflection of the heat from the walls; and in the parlor from the opposite houses. I fancy Virgil was so situated when he wrote those two beautiful lines:—

——— *Oh quis me gelidis in vallibus Hami,
Sistat, et ingenti ramorum protegat umbrâ!*

The worst of it is, that though the sunbeams strike as forcibly upon my harp-strings as they did upon his, they elicit no such sounds, but rather produce such groans as they are said to have drawn from those of the statue of Memnon."¹³ But Mrs. Unwin had, with excellent judgment, suggested to him a species of poetry, in which, of all others, at that time, he was likely to engage more willingly, and with most benefit to himself. For a young and presumptuous poet, (and presumptuousness is but too naturally connected with the consciousness of youthful power,) a disposition to write satires is one of the most dangerous he can encourage. It tempts him to personalities, which are not always forgiven after he has repented, and become ashamed of them; it ministers to his self-conceit; if he takes the tone of invective, it leads him to be uncharitable; and if he takes that of ridicule, one of the most fatal habits which any one can contract, is that of looking at all things in a ludicrous point of view. Cowper was liable to none of these evil consequences. He had outlived the prejudices of the Westminster Club, and could see and acknowledge merit out of what had formerly been his own set. Whether or not time had produced any change in his political prepossessions, it had removed from public life most of those persons who had been to him objects either

¹² To Mr. Newton, April 8, 1781.

¹³ July 17, 1779.

of exaggerated admiration, or ill-founded dislike. If his dwelling had indeed been

“—— a lodge in some vast wilderness,
Some boundless contiguity of shade,”¹⁴

he could scarcely have been more removed from all influences that might warp his judgment ; so little did he converse upon passing events and the actors who were then fretting their hour upon the stage, and so little were his thoughts directed towards them. He had the hope and the belief that he was usefully employed, and the consciousness that he was endeavoring to be so ; and his friends, on their part, might reasonably entertain a persuasion that such an employment would gradually produce a healthy state of mind,—that in proportion as he felt himself a humble, but willing and zealous instrument of good, he would cease to think it possible that, with such intentions and desires, he could be an object of particular reprobation.

He had begun these moral satires with the ardor of one whose heart was in his work. That ardor abated somewhat in his progress. “*Retirement*,” he says, “grows, but more slowly than any of its predecessors. Time was when I could with ease produce fifty, sixty, or seventy lines in a morning ; now, I generally fall short of thirty, and am sometimes forced to be content with a dozen.”¹⁵ At first, too, the prospect of publication gave him little pleasure, and excited no expectation. “No man,” said he, “ever wrote such a quantity of verse as I have written this last year, with so much indifference about the event, or rather with so little ambition of public praise. My pieces are such as may possibly be made useful. The more they are approved, the more likely they are to spread, and consequently the more likely they are to attain the end of usefulness ; which, as I said once before, except my present amusement, is the only end I propose. And, even in the pursuit of this purpose, commendable as it is in itself, I have not the spur I should once have had. My labor must go unre-

¹⁴ Task.

¹⁵ To Mr. Newton, Sept. 18, 1781.

warded, and, as Mr. R. once said, I am raising a scaffold before a house that others are to live in, and not I." ¹⁶

When the volume was within a sheet or two of its conclusion, he expressed the same feeling to Mr. Newton: "I sometimes feel such a perfect indifference, with respect to the public opinion of my book, that I am ready to flatter myself no censure of reviewers, or other critical readers, would occasion me the smallest disturbance. But not feeling myself constantly possessed of this desirable apathy, I am sometimes apt to suspect that it is not altogether sincere, or at least that I may lose it just in the moment when I may happen most to want it. Be it, however, as it may, I am still persuaded that it is not in their power to mortify me much. I have intended well, and performed to the best of my ability;—so far was right, and this is a boast of which they cannot rob me. If they condemn my poetry, I must even say with Cervantes, 'Let them do better if they can!'—if my doctrine, they judge that which they do not understand; I shall except to the jurisdiction of the court, and plead *Coram non judice*. Even Horace could say he should neither be the plumper for the praise, nor the leaner for the condemnation of his reader; and it will prove me wanting to myself indeed, if, supported by so many sublimer considerations than he was master of, I cannot sit loose to popularity, which, like the wind, bloweth where it listeth, and is equally out of our command. If you, and two or three more such as you, say, Well done, it ought to give me more contentment, than if I could earn Churchill's laurels, and by the same means." ¹⁷

But in composing these poems, he had learned his own power, and had strengthened it; and that consciousness made him look to future exertion. "A French author," he observes to Mr. Unwin, says, "There is something very bewitching in authorship, and he that has written, will write again. If the critics do not set their foot upon this first egg that I have laid, and crush it, I shall probably verify his observation; and when I feel my spirits rise, and that I am armed with industry sufficient for the purpose, undertake

¹⁶ Aug. 16, 1781.

¹⁷ Feb. 2, 1782.

the production of another volume.”¹⁸ Three months afterwards he repeated this saying to Mr. Newton, and commented upon it thus: “It may be so. I can subscribe to the former part of his assertion from my own experience, having never found an amusement, among the many I have been obliged to have recourse to, that so well answered the purpose for which I used it. The quieting and composing effect of it was such, and so totally absorbed have I sometimes been in my rhyming occupation, that neither the past nor the future, — (those themes which to me are so fruitful in regret at other times,) — had any longer a share in my contemplation. For this reason I wish, and have often wished since the fit left me, that it would seize me again; but hitherto I have wished it in vain. I see no want of subjects, but I feel a total disability to discuss them. Whether it is thus with other writers, or not, I am ignorant; but I should suppose my case in this respect a little peculiar. The voluminous writers at least, whose vein of fancy seems always to have been rich in proportion to their occasions, cannot have been so unlike, and so unequal to themselves. There is this difference between my poetship and the generality of them, they have been ignorant how much they have stood indebted to an Almighty power, for the exercise of those talents they have supposed their own; whereas I know, and know most perfectly, and am perhaps to be taught it to the last, that my power to think, whatever it be, and consequently my power to compose, is, as much as my outward form, afforded to me by the same hand that makes me in any respect to differ from a brute. This lesson, if not constantly inculcated, might perhaps be forgotten, or at least too slightly remembered.”¹⁹

There were but few persons to whom Cowper presented his volume; Thurlow was one. “An author,” said he, is an important character. Whatever his merits may be, the mere circumstance of authorship warrants his approach to persons whom otherwise, perhaps, he could hardly address without being deemed impertinent. He can do me no good. If I should happen to do him a little, I shall be

¹⁸ Nov. 24, 1781.

¹⁹ Feb. 16, 1782.

a greater man than he.”²⁰ With the volume he sent the following letter: —

TO LORD THURLOW.

MY LORD,

Olney, Bucks, Feb. 25, 1782.

I make no apology for what I account a duty; I should offend against the cordiality of our former friendship, should I send a volume into the world, and forget how much I am bound to pay my particular respects to your Lordship upon that occasion. When we parted, you little thought of hearing from me again; and I as little that I should live to write to you, still less that I should wait on you in the capacity of an author.

Among the pieces I have the honor to send, there is one for which I must entreat your pardon. I mean that of which your Lordship is the subject. The best excuse I can make is, that it flowed almost spontaneously from the affectionate remembrance of a connection that did me so much honor.

As to the rest, their merits, if they have any, and their defects, which are probably more than I am aware of, will neither of them escape your notice. But where there is much discernment, there is generally much candor; and I commit myself into your Lordship's hands with the less anxiety, being well acquainted with yours.

If my first visit, after so long an interval, should prove neither a troublesome nor a dull one, but especially if not altogether an unprofitable one, *omne tuli punctum*.

I have the honor to be, though with very different impressions of some subjects, yet with the same sentiments of affection and esteem as ever, your Lordship's faithful and most obedient, humble servant,

W. C.

The style of this letter, so different from that in which Cowper addressed his correspondents, shows that, however highly he estimated the importance of an author, he was fully sensible of what was due to the dignity of his old

²⁰ To Mr. Unwin, Feb. 24, 1782.

friend's station. Yet, if the Lord Chancellor had been a stranger, Cowper would never have presumed upon an author's privilege. Time and change had not weakened his affectionate regard for Thurlow; and though some degree of pride may have contributed to keep it alive, as if some honor were reflected upon him by the elevation of one with whom, during so many years, he had lived in familiar intercourse, the prevailing motive was undoubtedly that feeling of kindness which the remembrance of former times produced. He looked for a letter from Thurlow with more anxiety than he expected the opinion of periodical critics, or of the public. "Whether," he says to Mr. Unwin, "I shall receive any answer from his Chancellorship or not, is at present in *ambiguo*, and will probably continue in the same state of ambiguity much longer. He is so busy a man, and at this time, if the papers may be credited, so particularly busy, that I am forced to mortify myself with the thought, that both my book and my letter may be thrown into a corner, as too insignificant for a statesman's notice, and never found till his executor finds them. The affair, however, is neither *ad* my *libitum* nor his. I have sent him the truth, and the truth which I know he is ignorant of."²¹ He that put it into the heart of a certain eastern monarch to amuse himself in sleepless nights with listening to the records of his kingdom, is able to give birth to such another occasion in Lord Thurlow's instance, and inspire him with a curiosity to know what he has received from a friend he once loved and valued."²²

Another fortnight elapsed, and in reply to some favorable opinions which Mr. Unwin had communicated, Cowper observes, "Alas, we shall never receive such commendations from him on the woolsack! He has great abilities, but no religion. Mr. Hill told him some time since, that I was going to publish; to which piece of information, so far as I can learn, he returned no answer, for Mr. Hill has not reported any to me. He had afterwards an opportunity to converse with him in private, but my poor authorship was

²¹ Thurlow was living when Hayley published this letter; and therefore the latter half of this sentence was omitted.

²² March 18.

not so much as mentioned ; whence I learn two lessons ; first, that however important I may be in my own eyes, I am very insignificant in his ; and, secondly, that I am never likely to receive any acknowledgment of the favor I have conferred upon his Lordship, either under his own hand, or by the means of a third person ; and, consequently, that our intercourse has ceased forever, for I shall not have such another opportunity to revive it.”²³

Cowper had sent his volume to Colman also, one of the few surviving members of their Club. Thornton was dead ; he died at the age of forty-four, having been married only four years, and leaving a widow and three children. His death was a great loss to literature, as well as to his family and friends. Notwithstanding the change which had taken place in Cowper's views and in his way of life, the feelings of old intimacy were not dead in him ; and believing that they were only dormant in others, he expected that they would be awakened in Colman, who, next to Hill, seems to have had a higher place in his affections than any other member of the Club. But Colman, like Thurlow, never thanked him for his book ; and their silence was an incivility as well as an unkindness, which Cowper's nature was too sensitive to bear, without giving some vent to his wounded feelings. At first, he had made those excuses for them, which a man readily devises when he fears to find a friend in fault ; but when month after month had passed away, and it could no longer be doubted that he was neglected by both, he poured forth some indignant verses, which he sent to his friend Unwin, laying him under no other injunction concerning them, except that they were not for the press. “The unkind behavior of our acquaintance,” said he, “though it is possible that in some instances it may not much affect our happiness, nor engross many of our thoughts, will sometimes obtrude itself upon us with a degree of importunity not easily resisted ; and then, perhaps, though almost insensible of it before, we feel more than the occasion will justify. In such a moment it was that I conceived this poem, and gave loose to a degree of resentment, which, perhaps, I ought not to have indulged, but which, in a cooler hour, I cannot

altogether condemn. My former intimacy with the two characters was such, that I could not but feel myself provoked by the neglect with which they both treated me on a late occasion. So much by way of preface."²⁴

The poem itself is one of those pieces which may more properly be inserted in the biography of an author, than placed among his works, were it only for this cause, that they are read to more advantage when the circumstances which gave birth to them are fully understood, and fresh in the reader's mind. The latter half only was published by Hayley ; there is now no reason for suppressing the former.

THE VALEDICTION.

FAREWELL, false hearts ! whose best affections fail,
Like shallow brooks which summer suns exhale ;
Forgetful of the man whom once ye chose,
Cold in his cause, and careless of his woes ;
I bid you both a long and last adieu !
Cold in my turn, and unconcerned like you.

First, farewell Niger ! whom, now duly proved,
I disregard as much as I have loved.
Your brain well furnished, and your tongue well taught
To press with energy your ardent thought,
Your senatorial dignity of face,
Sound sense, intrepid spirit, manly grace,
Have raised you high as talents can ascend,
Made you a peer, but spoiled you for a friend !
Pretend to all that parts have e'er acquired ;
Be great, be feared, be envied, be admired ;
To fame as lasting as the earth pretend,
But not hereafter to the name of friend !
I sent you verse, and, as your lordship knows,
Backed with a modest sheet of humble prose ;
Not to recall a promise to your mind,
Fulfilled with ease had you been so inclined,
But to comply with feelings, and to give
Proof of an old affection still alive.
Your sullen silence serves at least to tell
Your altered heart ; and so, my lord, farewell !

Next, busy actor on a meaner stage,
Amusement-monger of a trifling age,

²⁴ Nov. 10, 1783.

Illustrious histrionic patentee,
 Terentius, once my friend, farewell to thee!
 In thee some virtuous qualities combine,
 To fit thee for a nobler post than thine,
 Who, born a gentleman, hast stooped too low,
 To live by buskin, sock, and raree-show.
 Thy schoolfellow, and partner of thy plays,
 When Nichol swung the birch and twined the bays,
 And having known thee bearded and full grown,
 The weekly censor of a laughing town,
 I thought the volume I presumed to send,
 Graced with the name of a long-absent friend,
 Might prove a welcome gift, and touch thine heart,
 Not hard by nature, in a feeling part.
 But thou, it seems, (what cannot grandeur do,
 Though but a dream!) art grown disdainful too;
 And, strutting in thy school of queens and kings,
 Who fret their hour and are forgotten things,
 Hast caught the cold distemper of the day,
 And, like his lordship, cast thy friend away.

Oh friendship! cordial of the human breast!
 So little felt, so fervently professed!
 Thy blossoms deck our unsuspecting years;
 The promise of delicious fruit appears:
 We hug the hopes of constancy and truth,
 Such is the folly of our dreaming youth;
 But soon, alas! detect the rash mistake
 That sanguine inexperience loves to make;
 And view with tears th' expected harvest lost,
 Decayed by time, or withered by a frost.
 Whoever undertakes a friend's great part,
 Should be renewed in nature, pure in heart,
 Prepared for martyrdom, and strong to prove
 A thousand ways the force of genuine love.
 He may be called to give up health and gain,
 T' exchange content for trouble, ease for pain,
 To echo sigh for sigh, and groan for groan,
 And wet his cheeks with sorrows not his own.
 The heart of man, for such a task too frail,
 When most relied on, is most sure to fail;
 And, summoned to partake its fellow's woe,
 Starts from its office, like a broken bow.

Votaries of business, and of pleasure, prove
 Faithless alike in friendship and in love.
 Retired from all the circles of the gay,
 And all the crowds that bustle life away,
 To scenes where competition, envy, strife,
 Beget no thunder-clouds to trouble life,

Let me the charge of some good angel find,
 One who has known and has escaped mankind ;
 Polite, yet virtuous, who has brought away
 The manners, not the morals, of the day :
 With him, perhaps with *her*, (for men have known
 No firmer friendships than the fair have shown,)
 Let me enjoy, in some unthought-of spot,
 All former friends forgiven, and forgot,
 Down to the close of life's fast-fading scene,
 Union of hearts, without a flaw between.
 'Tis grace, 'tis bounty, and it calls for praise,
 If God give health, that sunshine of our days ;
 And if he had, a blessing shared by few,
 Content of heart, more praises still are due :
 But if he grant a friend, that boon possessed
 Indeed is treasure, and crowns all the rest ;
 And giving one, whose heart is in the skies,
 Born from above, and made divinely wise,
 He gives, what bankrupt Nature never can,
 Whose noblest coin is light and brittle man,
 Gold, purer far than Ophir ever knew,
 A soul, an image of himself, and therefore true.

"You say you felt my verses," Cowper says in reply to Mr. Unwin's remarks upon them. "I assure you that in this you followed my example, for I felt them first. A man's lordship is nothing to me any further than in connection with qualities that entitle him to my respect. If he thinks himself privileged by it, and treats me with neglect, I am his humble servant, and shall never be at a loss to render him an equivalent. I am, however, most angry with the manager. He has published a book since he received mine, and has not vouchsafed to send it me ; a requital which good manners, not to say the remembrance of former friendship, ought to have suggested. I will not, however, belie my knowledge of mankind so much as to seem surprised at treatment which I had abundant reason to expect. To these men with whom I was once intimate, and for many years, I am no longer necessary, no longer convenient, or in any respect an object. They think of me as of the man in the moon ; and whether I have a lantern, a dog, and a fagot, or whether I have neither of those desirable accommodations, is to them a matter of perfect indifference. Upon that point we are agreed, our indifference is mutual :

and were I to publish again, which is not impossible, I should give them a proof of it.”²⁵

As a giver of good counsel, Cowper said he wished to please all; but as an author he flattered himself that he was perfectly indifferent to the judgment of all, except the few who were really judicious. He had pleased those persons whom he was most desirous of pleasing; Mrs. Unwin, who saw the poems in their progress; Mr. Newton, by whom they were criticised on the way to the press; and Mr. Unwin, with whom he corresponded as with a friend and brother. Nothing, since the publication of the volume, he said, had given him so much pleasure as *his* favorable opinion. “The circumstance, however, in your letter, which pleased me most, was, that you wrote in high spirits, and though you said much, suppressed more, lest you should hurt my delicacy. My delicacy is obliged to you; but you observe it is not so squeamish but that after it has feasted upon praise expressed, it can find a comfortable dessert in the contemplation of praise implied. I now feel as if I should be glad to begin another volume; but from the will to the power is a step too wide for me to take at present; and the season of the year brings with it so many avocations into the garden, where I am my own *factotum*, that I have little or no leisure for the quill.”²⁶ An unfavorable account of his book, in the *Critical Review*, somewhat dejected him, though he considered that those reviewers could not read, without prejudice, a volume replete with opinions and doctrines contrary to their own. But without prejudice on the score of opinions, and without individual ill-will, or the envious disposition which not unfrequently produces the same effect, a dull critic or a pert one is generally ready enough to condemn what he wants heart to feel, or understanding to appreciate. This review of Cowper’s first volume is one of those defunct criticisms which deserve to be disinterred and gibbeted for the sake of example.

“These poems are written, as we learn from the title-page, by Mr. Cowper, of the Inner Temple, who seems to be a man of a sober and religious turn of mind, with a benevolent heart, and a serious wish to inculcate the precepts of

²⁵ Nov. 24. 1783.

²⁶ March 18, 1783.

morality; he is not, however, possessed of any superior abilities, or power of genius, requisite to so arduous an undertaking; his verses are in general weak and languid, and have neither novelty, spirit, or animation to recommend them; that mediocrity, so severely condemned by Horace, *Non Dii non homines*, &c. pervades the whole; and whilst the author avoids every thing that is ridiculous or contemptible, he, at the same time, never rises to any thing that we can commend or admire. He says what is incontrovertible, and what has already been said over and over, with much gravity, but says nothing new, sprightly, or entertaining; travelling on a plain, level, flat road, with great composure, almost through the whole long and tedious volume, which is little better than a dull sermon, in very indifferent verse, on Truth, the Progress of Error, Charity, and some other grave subjects. If this author had followed the advice given by Caraccioli, and which he has chosen for one of the mottoes prefixed to these poems, he would have clothed his indisputable truths in some becoming *disguise*, and rendered his work much more agreeable. In its present shape we cannot compliment him on its shape or beauty; for, as this bard himself *sweetly* sings,—

“The clear harangue, and cold as it is clear,
Falls soporific on the listless ear.”²⁷

“He that misses his end,” says Dr. Johnson, “will never be as much pleased as he that attains it, even when he can impute no part of his failure to himself.” Cowper, however, was more than compensated for this transient mortification, when one of his friends, who had sent the book to Dr. Franklin, (then in France,) transmitted to him the letter

²⁷ Critical Review, April, 1782. The reviewer then quotes fifty lines from *Hope*, and observes upon them, “All this is very true; but there needs no ghost, nor author, nor poet, to tell us what we knew before, unless he could tell it us in a new and better manner.” Some of his expressions are noticed as being “coarse, vulgar, and unpoetical;” he is said not to have succeeded in his “attempt to be lively, facetious, and satirical any more than in the serious and pathetic;” and the sapient critic concludes by saying, that, “after dragging through Mr. Cowper’s long moral lectures, his lighter pieces, such as the *Lily* and the *Rose*, and the *Nightingale* and the *Glowworm*, afford some relief, as best adapted to his genius.”

which he had received in return.²⁸ "The relish," said Franklin, "for reading of poetry had long since left me; but there is something here so new in the manner, so easy and yet so correct in the language, so clear in the expression, yet concise, and so just in the sentiment, that I have read the whole with great pleasure, and some of the pieces more than once." "We may now," said Cowper, "treat the critics as the Archbishop of Toledo treated Gil Blas, when he found fault with one of his sermons. His grace gave him a kick, and said, 'Begone for a jackanapes! and furnish yourself with a better taste, if you know where to find it.'"

In that vein of natural pleasantry which characterizes his letters, and especially those to Mr. Unwin, he says to that friend, "Before I had published, I said to myself— You and I, Mr. Cowper, will not concern ourselves much about what the critics may say of our book! But having once sent my wits for a venture, I soon became anxious about the issue, and found that I could not be satisfied with a warm place in my own good graces, unless my friends were pleased with me as much as I pleased myself. Meeting with their approbation, I began to feel the workings of ambition. It is well, said I, that my friends are pleased; but friends are sometimes partial, and mine, I have reason to think, are not altogether free from bias. Methinks I should like to hear a stranger or two speak well of me. I was presently gratified by the approbation of the London Magazine, and the Gentleman's, particularly by that of the former, and by the plaudit of Dr. Franklin. By the way, magazines are publications we have but little respect for, till we ourselves are chronicled in them, and then they assume an importance in our esteem which before we could not allow them. But the Monthly Review, the most formidable of all my judges, is still behind. What will that critical Rhadamanthus say, when my shivering genius shall appear before him? Still he keeps me in hot water, and I must wait another month for his award. Alas! when I wish for a favorable sentence from that quarter, (to confess

a weakness that I should not confess to all), I feel myself not a little influenced by a tender regard to my reputation here, even among my neighbors at Olney. Here are watch-makers, who themselves are wits, and who at present, perhaps, think me one. Here is a carpenter and a baker, and, not to mention others, here is your idol Mr. Teedon, whose smile is fame. All these read the *Monthly Review*, and all these will set me down for a dunce if those terrible critics should show them the example. But, Oh! wherever else I am accounted dull, dear Mr. Griffiths, let me pass for a genius at Olney!"²⁹

Johnson wished Mr. Unwin to review his friend's book in this journal which, by its undisputed authority, was to mark him for honor or dishonor at Olney; and not at Olney alone, but among all that class of readers who received their opinions upon current literature, once a month, ready made. Cowper seconded the solicitation. "Doubt not," said he, "your abilities for the task which Johnson would recommend to you. The reviewers are such fiery Socinians, that they have less charity for a man of my avowed principles, than a Portuguese for a Jew. They may possibly find here and there somewhat to commend, but will undoubtedly reprobate the doctrines, pronounce me a Methodist, and, by so doing, probably check the sale of the volume, if not suppress it. Wherein consists your difficulty? Your private judgment once made public, and the world made acquainted with what you think and what you feel while you read me by the fireside, the business is done; I am reviewed, and my book forwarded in its progress by a judicious recommendation. In return, write a book, and I will be your reviewer; thus we may hold up each other to public admiration, and turn our friendship to good account. But, seriously, I think you perfectly qualified for the undertaking; and if you have no other objection to it than what arises from self-distrust, am persuaded you need only make the experiment to confirm yourself."³⁰

If Mr. Unwin consented, he kept his own secret. The reviewal, when it appeared, was so judicious that it might be suspected to be his, if it were not likely that he would

²⁹ June 12.

³⁰ April 1, 1782.

have enlarged more upon the merits of a friend whom he loved so dearly. The little that was said was singularly appropriate. "What Pope," it begins, "has remarked of women, may, by a very applicable parody, be said of the general run of modern poets : —

Most *poets* have no character at all ;

being, for the chief part, only echoes of those who have sung before them. For while not only their sentiments and diction are borrowed, but their very modes of thinking as well as versification are copied from the said models, discrimination of character must of course be scarcely perceptible. Confining themselves like packhorses to the same beaten track and uniformity of pace, and like them, too, having their bells from the same shop, they go jingling along in uninterrupted unison with each other. This, however, is not the case with Mr. Cowper ; he is a poet *sui generis* ; for as his notes are peculiar to himself, he classes not with any known species of bards that have preceded him ; his style of composition, as well as his modes of thinking, are entirely his own. The ideas with which his mind seems to have been either endowed by nature, or to have been enriched by learning and reflection, as they lie in no regular order, so are they promiscuously brought forth as they accidentally present themselves. Mr. Cowper's predominant turn of mind, though serious and devotional, is at the same time dryly humorous and sarcastic. Hence, his very religion has a smile that is arch, and his sallies of humor an air that is religious ; and yet, motley as is the mixture, it is so contrived as to be neither ridiculous nor disgusting. His versification is almost as singular as the materials upon which it is employed. Anxious only to give each image its due prominence and relief, he has wasted no unnecessary attention on grace or embellishment ; his language, therefore, though neither strikingly humorous nor elegant, is plain, forcible, and expressive."

A fair extract from "Retirement" was then produced as "a specimen of this singular writer's manner ;" and this was followed by the passage from "Hope" concerning the

Greenland³¹ Missionaries, as not only marking, it was said, the bias of the writer's mind, but showing also that he can, when he chooses, be elegant and poetical." This was all.

This was fair and discriminating praise, but it was scanty. It saved the author's credit with his neighbors, but was not the sort of commendation by which the sale of the book was likely to be promoted. Cowper said the Monthly Reviewer had satisfied him well enough; and as this was said to Mr. Unwin, it would be proof enough that he was not the critic, even if the meagreness of the article had not shown that it came from one who took no interest in the success of the volume. In a letter written about this time to the same friend, he says, "You tell me you have been asked if I am intent upon another volume. I reply: Not at present; not being convinced that I have met with sufficient encouragement. I account myself happy in having pleased a *few*, but am not rich enough to despise the *many*. I do not know what sort of a market my commodity has found; but if a slack one, I must beware how I make a second attempt. My bookseller will not be willing to incur a certain loss; and I can as little afford it."³²

Month after month elapsed; his friends praised his poems to him, and reported the praise of others, but there came no tidings of the sale. "My dear William," he says to Unwin, "I feel myself sensibly obliged by the interest you take in the success of my productions. Your feelings upon the subject are such as I should have myself, had I an opportunity of calling Johnson aside to make the inquiry you propose. But I am pretty well prepared for the worst, and, so long as I have the opinion of a few capable judges in my favor, and am thereby convinced that I have neither disgraced myself nor my subject, shall not feel myself disposed to any extreme anxiety about the sale. To aim with success at the spiritual good of mankind, and to become popular by writing upon scriptural subjects, were an unreasonable

³¹ The selection of this passage leads me to suppose that it may have been written by Mr. Latrobe; he was known both to Mr. Newton and Dr. Johnson, and is likely to have been the person to whom the publisher "recommended the book and the business."

³² Nov. 18, 1781.

ambition, even for a poet to entertain in days like these. Verse may have many charms, but has none powerful enough to conquer the aversion of a dissipated age to such instruction. Ask the question, therefore, boldly, and be not mortified even though he should shake his head and drop his chin ; for it is no more than we have reason to expect. We will lay the fault upon the vice of the times, and we will acquit the poet.”³³

But it had become necessary for him to employ himself in composition. In a letter written three years after this time, he says, “When I was writing my first volume, and was but just beginning to emerge from a state of melancholy that had continued some years, (from which, by the way, I do not account myself even now delivered,) Mrs. Unwin insisted on my relinquishing the pen, apprehending consequences injurious to my health. When ladies *insist*, you know there is an end of the business ; obedience on our part becomes necessary ; I accordingly obeyed ; but having lost my fiddle, I became pensive and unhappy ; she therefore restored it to me, convinced of its utility ; and from that day to this, I have never ceased to scrape.”³⁴ It had thus been proved by experience, that exercise of mind as well as body was indispensably requisite for his well-being ; and experience had also shown how important it was that the subjects upon which he employed himself should not produce in him any degree of passionate excitement.

When Mr. Unwin wrote to Cowper that his wife had been moved both to smiles and tears by his poetry, Cowper replied, “I should do myself much wrong were I to omit mentioning the great complacency with which I read this account. If she had Aristotle by heart, I should not esteem her judgment so highly, were she defective in point of feeling, as I do, and must esteem it, knowing her to have such feelings as Aristotle could not communicate, and as half the readers in the world are destitute of. This it is that makes me set so high a price upon your mother’s opinion. She is a critic by nature and not by rule, and has a perception of what is good or bad in composition, that I never knew de-

³³ Aug. 4, 1783.

³⁴ To Lady Hesketh, Dec. 15, 1785.

ceive her ; insomuch that when two sorts of expression have pleaded equally for the precedence in my own esteem, and I have referred, as in such cases I always did, the decision of the point to her, I never knew her at a loss for a just one." ³⁵

Were I to say that a poet finds his best advisers among his female friends, it would be speaking from my own experience, and the greatest poet of the age would confirm it by his. But never was any poet more indebted to such friends than Cowper. Had it not been for Mrs. Unwin, he would probably never have appeared in his own person as an author ; had it not been for Lady Austen, he would never have been a popular one. The most fortunate incident in his literary life was that which introduced him to this lady. She had now disposed of the lease of her house in London, and had taken up her abode in the vicarage. The door which Mr. Newton had opened from his garden into his friend's again became in use ; "and so captivating," says Hayley, "was her society both to Cowper and to Mrs. Unwin, that these intimate neighbors might be almost said to make one family, as it became their custom to dine always together, alternately, in the houses of the two ladies."

His letters were now not only expressive of content, but of enjoyment : "I am glad," he says to Mr. Hill, "your health is such that you have nothing more to complain of than may be expected on the down-hill side of life. If mine is better than yours, it is to be attributed, I suppose, principally, to the constant enjoyment of country air and retirement, — the most perfect regularity in matters of eating, drinking, and sleeping, — and a happy emancipation from every thing that wears the face of business. I lead the life I always wished for ; and, the single circumstance of dependence excepted, (which, between ourselves, is very contrary to my predominant humor and disposition,) have no want left broad enough for another wish to stand upon." ³⁶ Another letter describes the way in which his evenings were spent at this time.

³⁵ March 18, 1782.

³⁶ Nov. 11.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Dec. 7, 1782.

At seven o'clock this evening, being the seventh of December, I imagine I see you in your box at the coffee-house. No doubt the waiter, as ingenious and adroit as his predecessors were before him, raises the tea-pot to the ceiling with his right hand, while in his left the tea-cup, descending almost to the floor, receives a limpid stream, — limpid in its descent, but no sooner has it reached its destination, than frothing and foaming to the view, it becomes a roaring syllabub. This is the nineteenth winter since I saw you in this situation ; and if nineteen more pass over me before I die, I shall still remember a circumstance we have often laughed at.

How different is the complexion of your evenings and mine ! yours, spent amid the ceaseless hum that proceeds from the inside of fifty noisy and busy periwigs ; mine, by a domestic fireside, in 'a retreat as silent as retirement can make it ; where no noise is made but what we make for our own amusement. For instance, here are two rustics, and your humble servant in company. One of the ladies has been playing on the harpsichord, while I, with the other, have been playing at battledore and shuttlecock. A little dog, in the mean time, howling under the chair of the former, performed, in the vocal way, to admiration. This entertainment over, I began my letter, and having nothing more important to communicate, have given you an account of it. I know you love dearly to be idle, when you can find an opportunity to be so ; but as such opportunities are rare with you, I thought it possible that a short description of the idleness I enjoy might give you pleasure. The happiness we cannot call our own, we yet seem to possess, while we sympathize with our friends who can.

"From a scene of the most uninterrupted retirement," he says to Mr. Unwin, "we have passed at once into a state of constant engagement. Not that our society is much multiplied ; the addition of an individual has made all this difference. Lady Austen and we pass our days alternately at each other's *chateau*. In the morning I walk

with one or other of the ladies, and in the afternoon wind thread. Thus did Hercules, and thus probably did Samson, and thus do I; and were both those heroes living, I should not fear to challenge them to a trial of skill in that business, or doubt to beat them both. As to killing lions and other amusements of that kind, with which they were so delighted, I should be their humble servant and beg to be excused." ³⁷

For a while Lady Austen's conversation had as happy an effect upon the melancholy spirit of Cowper as the harp of David upon Saul. Whenever the cloud seemed to be coming over him, her sprightly ³⁸ powers were exerted to dispel it. One afternoon, ³⁹ when he appeared more than usually depressed, she told him the story of John Gilpin, which had been told to her in her childhood, and which, in her relation, tickled his fancy as much as it has that of thousands and tens of thousands since, in his. The next morning he said to her that he had been kept awake during the greater part of the night by thinking of the story and laughing at it, and that he had turned it into a ballad. The ballad was sent to Mr. Unwin, ⁴⁰ who said, in reply, that it had made him laugh tears. "As to the famous horseman," Cowper replied, "he and his feats are an inexhaustible source of merriment. At least we find him so; and seldom meet without refreshing ourselves with the recollection of them. You are perfectly at liberty to deal with them as you please. *Auctore tantum anonymo, imprimantur*; and, when printed, send me a copy." ⁴¹ It was sent accordingly to the Public Advertiser. "I little thought," said Cowper, "when I was writing the history of John Gilpin, that he would appear in print; I intended to laugh, and to make two or three others laugh, of whom you were one. But now all the world laugh, at least if they have the same relish for a tale ridiculous in itself, and quaintly told, as we have. Well, they do not always laugh so innocently, and at so small an expense, — for in a

³⁷ Jan. 19, 1783.

³⁸ Hayley, i. 312.

³⁹ Oct. 1782.

⁴⁰ This manuscript, in Cowper's beautiful hand, is one of the treasures with which I have been entrusted.

⁴¹ Nov. 4.

world like this, abounding with subjects for satire, and with satirical wits to mark them, a laugh that hurts nobody has at least the grace of novelty to recommend it. Swift's darling motto was, *Vive la bagatelle*; a good wish for a philosopher of his complexion, the greater part of whose wisdom, whencesoever it came, most certainly came not from above. *La bagatelle* has no enemy in me, though it has neither so warm a friend nor so able a one, as it had in him. If I trifle, and merely trifle, it is because I am reduced to it by necessity; a melancholy that nothing else so effectually disperses, engages me sometimes in the arduous task of being merry by force. And, strange, as it may seem, the most ludicrous lines I ever wrote have been written in the saddest mood, and but for that saddest mood, perhaps, had never been written at all."

Gilpin did not immediately become glorious, and Cowper, satisfied with amusing himself and his friend, little anticipated what a race of popularity the famous horseman was to run. The ballad was a species of poetry of which he had ever been fond, and to which, he said, more than to any other he should have addicted himself, if graver matters had not called him another way. His only tragic piece of this kind is the Dirge for the Royal George, and he was beholden to Lady Austen, if not for this subject also, for the occasion which induced him to choose it. It was composed to suit an air which she frequently played on the harpsichord; and he thought it a disadvantage that the air obliged him to write in Alexandrines, a measure which he supposed could suit no ear but a French one. In this he was mistaken; and though he intended nothing more than that the subject and the words should be sufficiently accommodated to the music, he pleased himself, and has pleased, and will please, all to whom it has or hereafter shall be recited or sung.

Another, and it is one of the playfullest and most characteristic of his pieces, was in like manner composed to be set and sung by the Sister Anne of those halcyon days. No other woman was ever made the subject of two poems so different, and each so original and perfect in its kind, as the Mary of this ballad.

THE DISTRESSED TRAVELLERS ;

OR,

LABOR IN VAIN.^a*An excellent New Song, to a Tune never sung before.*

1.

I sing of a journey to Clifton,
 We would have performed if we could,
 Without cart or barrow to lift on
 Poor Mary and me through the mud.
 Slee sla slud,
 Stuck in the mud,
 O, it is pretty to wade through a flood!

2.

So away we went, slipping and sliding,
 Hop, hop, *a la mode de deux* frogs.
 'Tis near as good walking as riding,
 When ladies are dressed in their clogs.
 Wheels, no doubt,
 Go briskly about,
 But they clatter and rattle, and make such a rout!

3.

SHE.

Well! now I protest it is charming;
 How finely the weather improves! —
 That cloud, though, is rather alarming;
 How slowly and stately it moves!

HE.

Pshaw! never mind;
 'Tis not in the wind;
 We are travelling south, and shall leave it behind.

4.

SHE.

I am glad we are come for an airing,
 For folks may be pounded and penned,
 Until they grow rusty, not caring
 To stir half a mile to an end.

^a This poem, which was published in the Monthly Magazine for January, 1808, has been overlooked in every edition of Cowper's poems from that time.

HE.

The longer we stay,
The longer we may ;
It's a folly to think about weather or way.

5.

SHE.

But now I begin to be frighted :
If I fall, what a way I should roll !
I am glad that the bridge was indicted. —
Stop ! stop ! I am sunk in a hole !

HE.

Nay, never care !
'Tis a common affair ;
You'll not be the last that will set a foot there.

6.

SHE.

Let me breathe now a little, and ponder
On what it were better to do.
That terrible lane, I see yonder,
I think we shall never get through !

HE.

So think I ;
But, by the bye,
We never shall know, if we never should try.

7.

SHE.

But should we get there, how shall we get home ?
What a terrible deal of bad road we have passed !
Slipping and sliding ; and if we should come
To a difficult stile, I am ruined at last,
Oh this lane !
Now it is plain
That struggling and striving is labor in vain.

8.

HE.

Stick fast there, while I go and look.

SHE.

Don't go away, for fear I should fall !

H.

I have examined it every nook,
 And what you have here is a sample of all.
 Come, wheel round;
 The dirt we have found
 Would be an estate at a farthing a pound.

9.

Now, Sister Anne, the guitar you must take;
 Set it, and sing it, and make it a song.
 I have varied the verse for variety sake,
 And cut it off short, because it was long.
 'Tis hobbling and lame,
 Which critics won't blame,
 For the sense and the sound, they say, should be the same.

Lady Austen has the honor also of having suggested at this time to Cowper the subject of that work which made him the most popular poet of his age, and raised him to a rank in English poetry from which no revolution of taste can detrude him. She had often urged him to try his powers in blank verse: at last he promised to comply with her request, if she would give him a subject. "Oh," she replied, "you can never be in want of a subject; you can write upon any; — write upon this Sofa!"⁴³ The answer was made with a woman's readiness, and the capabilities of such a theme were apprehended by Cowper with a poet's quickness of perception.

The Task was begun early⁴⁴ in the summer of 1783. He never mentioned it to Mr. Unwin till it was finished,

⁴³ The Elbow Chair, a Rhapsody, by the Rev. E. Cooper, of Droit-wyche, Worcestershire, was published in 1765. The coincidence of the nominal subject of the two poems, and of the manner in which both poets treated it, and of their names also, is very remarkable. I know the one poem only by the account of it in the Monthly Review for October, 1765. "We never," says the reviewer, "met with a more rhapsodical rhapsody than this of an honest Welsh parson, in praise of his own country: seated in his Elbow Chair, smoking his pipe, and ruminating on love and liberty and rural prospects, on the marriage-act, on angling, on churchyards, on hunting, on patriotism, and on the Scotch favorite." The poem is in blank verse, and the specimen which the reviewer has selected will be found in the supplementary notes.

⁴⁴ August 3, he writes to Mr. Bull, "The Sofa is ended, but not finished, — a paradox which your natural acumen, sharpened by habits

and ready for the press. The same silence was observed towards Mr. Newton, who visited Olney in the August of that year, for the second time after his removal. Mr. Newton, in writing from that place, says nothing more of him than that he and Mrs. Unwin were pretty well ; but the visit had an unfavorable effect upon Cowper, and the next letter to his friend describes the painful influence which his presence had had upon the latent disease.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Sept. 8, 1783.

I have been lately more dejected and more distressed than usual ; more harassed by dreams in the night, and more deeply poisoned by them in the following day. I know not what is portended by an alteration for the worse, after eleven years of misery ; but firmly believe that it is not designed as the introduction of a change for the better. You know not what I suffered while you were here, nor was there any need you should. Your friendship for me would have made you in some degree a partaker of my woes ; and your share in them would have been increased by your inability to help me. Perhaps, indeed, they took a keener edge from the consideration of your presence. The friend of my heart, the person with whom I had formerly taken sweet counsel, no longer useful to me as a minister, no longer pleasant to me as a Christian, was a spectacle that must necessarily add the bitterness of mortification to the sadness of despair. I now see a long winter before me, and am to get through it as I can. I know the ground, before I tread upon it. It is hollow ; it is agitated ; it suffers shocks in every direction ; it is like the soil of Calabria — all whirlpool and undulation. But I must reel through it ; at least, if I be not swallowed up by the way.

Yours,

W. C.

Cowper had given Mr. Newton before his arrival a hint

of logical attention, will enable you to reconcile in a moment. Do not imagine, however, that I lounge over it ; on the contrary, I find it severe exercise to mould and fashion it to my mind."

concerning the divisions in his former flock. "Because we have nobody," said he, "to preach the gospel at Olney, Mr. ——— waits only for a barn, at present occupied by a strolling company; and the moment they quit it he begins. He is disposed to think the dissatisfied of all denominations may possibly be united under his standard, and that the great work of forming a more extensive and more established interest is reserved for him."⁴⁵ Mr. Newton's successor in the cure had previously been his convert from opinions verging close upon the cold region of Socinianism, to a belief in the articles of the Church of England and in the Calvinistic sense wherein Mr. Newton understood them. He afterwards became a distinguished writer among persons of the same persuasion; but he had neither the genius nor the winning manners of his predecessor. Mr. Newton says of him, on this visit, "He is faithful, diligent, and exemplary, but rather of a hurrying spirit. I think, if he had more of my phlegmatic temper, he would make his way better at Olney. He had some ill impressions of the people, and many of them had strong prejudices against him, before they came together. Thus the beginning was not comfortable; and when things are thus, there is usually a too little and a too much on both sides. There are, however, some who love and prize him much; but he is not so generally acceptable as he would wish. Being curate of Weston, though he preaches twice on a Sunday at Olney, yet as three sermons have long been the custom of the town, the people go once to the Dissenters, some of whom spare no pains to set them against both Mr. Scott and the Church."⁴⁶

After his return home, he says, "I was very cordially received at Olney; the heats and animosities which prevailed when I was there last, seem in a good measure subsided. There are, however, many who have left the Church, and hear among the Dissenters; but I hope they have not left the Lord. Mr. Scott has some, and some of the best, who are affectionately attached to him. Mr. Scott is a good and upright man, and a good preacher; but

⁴⁵ Feb. 8, 1783.

⁴⁶ To Mr. Thornton, 23 Aug. 1785.

different ministers have different ways. He met with great prejudices, and some very improper treatment, upon his first coming to Olney. He found several professors who had more leaves than fruit, more talk than grace; his spirit was rather hurt by what he saw amiss, and by what he felt. By what I can learn from those who love him best, he is very faithful and zealous in reproofing what is wrong; but an unfavorable impression he has received, that the people at large do not like him, gives a sort of edge to his preaching which is not so well suited to conciliate them. The best of the Olney people are an afflicted people, and have been led through great inward conflicts and spiritual distresses, and for want of some experience of the like kind, he cannot so well hit their cases, nor sympathize with them so tenderly as might be wished. He has the best intentions; but his natural temper is rather positive, than gentle and yielding. I was, perhaps, faulty in the other extreme; but they had been so long used to me, that a different mode of treatment does not so well suit them. But still he is an excellent man, he serves the Lord with a single eye, and I hope his difficulties abate, and his usefulness is upon the increase. I trust time, observation, and experience, will, under the Lord's gracious teaching, daily soften and ripen his spirit."⁴⁷

Another fire, which took place this winter in this poor town, evinced that the restraints both of law and gospel were grievously needed at Olney. Cowper describes the alarm, the confusion, and the consequences in his own inimitable style.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Nov. 3, 1783.

My time is short, and my opportunity not the most favorable. My letter will consequently be short likewise, and perhaps not very intelligible. I find it no very easy matter to bring my mind into that degree of composure, which is necessary to the arrangement either of words or matter. You will naturally expect to receive some account of this confusion that I describe, some reason given for it. — On

⁴⁷ Hoxton, Sept. 8, 1783.

Saturday night, at eleven o'clock, when I had not been in bed five minutes, I was alarmed by a cry of fire, announced by two or three shrill screams upon our staircase. Our servants, who were going to bed, saw it from their windows, and in appearance so near, that they thought our house in danger. I immediately rose, and putting by the curtain, saw sheets of fire rising above the ridge of Mr. Palmer's house, opposite to ours. The deception was such that I had no doubt it had begun with *him*, but soon found that it was rather farther off. In fact, it was at three places ;— in the out-houses belonging to George Griggs, Lucy and Abigail Tyrrel. Having broke out in three different parts, it is supposed to have been maliciously kindled. A tar-barrel and a quantity of tallow made a most tremendous blaze, and the buildings it had seized upon being all thatched, the appearance became every moment more formidable. Providentially, the night was perfectly calm ; so calm that candles without lanterns, of which there were multitudes in the street, burnt as steadily as in a house. By four in the morning it was so far reduced, that all danger seemed to be over ; but the confusion it had occasioned was almost infinite. Every man who supposed his dwelling-house in jeopardy, emptied it as fast as he could, and conveyed his movables to the house of some neighbor, supposed to be more secure. Ours, in the space of two hours, was so filled with all sorts of lumber, that we had not even room for a chair by the fireside. George Griggs is the principal sufferer. He gave eighteen guineas, or nearly that sum, to a woman whom, in his hurry, he mistook for his wife ; but the supposed wife walked off with the money, and he will probably never recover it. He has likewise lost forty pounds' worth of wool. London never exhibited a scene of greater depredation, drunkenness, and riot. Every thing was stolen that could be got at, and every drop of liquor drunk that was not guarded. Only one thief has yet been detected ; a woman of the name of J——, who was stopped by young Handscomb with an apron full of plunder. He was forced to strike her down, before he could wrest it from her. Could you visit the place, you would see a most striking proof of a Providence interposing to stop the prog-

ness of the flames. They had almost reached, that is to say, within six yards of Daniel Raban's wood-pile, in which were fifty pounds' worth of fagots and furze; and exactly there they were extinguished; otherwise, especially if a breath of air had happened to move, all that side of the town must probably have been consumed. After all this dreadful conflagration, we find nothing burnt but the out-houses; and the dwellings to which they belonged have suffered only the damage of being unroofed on that side next the fire. No lives were lost, nor any limbs broken. Mrs. Unwin, whose spirits served her while the hubbub lasted, and the day after, begins to feel the effect of it now. But I hope she will be relieved from it soon, being better this evening than I expected. As for me, I am impregnable to all such assaults. I have nothing, however, but this subject in my mind, and it is in vain that I invite any other into it. Having, therefore, exhausted this, I finish, assuring you of our united love, and hoping to find myself in a frame of mind more suited to my employment when I write next.

Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Nov. 17, 1783.

The country around is much alarmed with apprehensions of fire. Two have happened, since that of Olney. One at Hitchin, where the damage is said to amount to eleven thousand pounds; and another, at a place not far from Hitchin, of which I have not learnt the name. Letters have been dropped at Bedford, threatening to burn the town; and the inhabitants have been so intimidated, as to have placed a guard in many parts of it, several nights past. Since our conflagration here, we have sent two women and a boy to the justice, for depredation; S—— R——, for stealing a piece of beef, which, in her excuse, she said she intended to take care of. This lady, whom you well remember, escaped for want of evidence; not that evidence was indeed wanting, but our men of Gotham judged it unnecessary to send it. With her went the woman I mentioned before, who, it seems, has made some sort of profession, but upon

this occasion allowed herself a latitude of conduct rather inconsistent with it, having filled her apron with wearing-apparel, which she likewise intended to take care of. She would have gone to the county jail, had William Raban, the baker's son, who prosecuted, insisted upon it; but he good-naturedly, though I think weakly, interposed in her favor, and begged her off. The young gentleman who accompanied these fair ones, is the junior son of Molly Boswell. He had stolen some iron work, the property of Griggs, the butcher. Being convicted, he was ordered to be whipped, which operation he underwent at the cart's tail, from the stone-house to the high arch, and back again. He seemed to show great fortitude, but it was all an imposition upon the public. The beadle, who performed it, had filled his left hand with red ochre, through which, after every stroke, he drew the lash of his whip, leaving the appearance of a wound upon the skin, but in reality not hurting him at all. This being perceived by Mr. Constable H——, who followed the beadle, he applied his cane, without any such management or precaution, to the shoulders of the too merciful executioner. The scene immediately became more interesting. The beadle could by no means be prevailed upon to strike hard, which provoked the constable to strike harder; and this double flogging continued, till a lass of Silver-end, pitying the pitiful beadle thus suffering under the hands of the pitiless constable, joined the procession, and, placing herself immediately behind the latter, seized him by his capillary club, and pulling him backwards by the same, slapped his face with a most Amazonian fury. This concatenation of events has taken up more of my paper than I intended it should, but I could not forbear to inform you how the beadle threshed the thief, the constable the beadle, and the lady the constable, and how the thief was the only person concerned who suffered nothing. Mr. Teedon has been here, and is gone again. He came to thank me for some left-off clothes. In answer to our inquiries after his health, he replied that he had a slow fever, which made him take all possible care not to inflame his blood. I admitted his prudence, but, in his particular instance, could not very clearly discern the need of it. Pump water will not heat him

much ; and, to speak a little in his own style, more inebriating fluids are to him, I fancy, not very attainable. He brought us news, the truth of which, however, I do not vouch for, that the town of Bedford was actually on fire yesterday, and the flames not extinguished when the bearer of the tidings left it.

The poor at Olney were miserably poor, and where miserable poverty exists, depravity is as often the consequence as the cause. More than twenty years after this time the average earnings of women at the lace-pillow was estimated at nearly six shillings a week ; in a few extreme cases they had amounted to eight or nine ; but the expense of thread amounted to an eighth of the gross value of the lace. From such wages it was scarcely possible, under the most favorable circumstances, to make any provision against evil days ; and the employment is an unhealthy one,— as any sedentary employment must be wherein human beings are occupied in summer from six or seven in the morning till dusk, and in winter from daylight till ten or eleven at night. A cry against slavery was raised in Cowper's days ; his voice was heard in it ; in our own days it has prevailed, and brought about a consummation which was devoutly to be wished ; though it were to be wished also, that the emancipation had been graduated, and the negroes better prepared for it. A cry has now been raised against that manufacturing system which in our own country extorts from what is called free labor more than slavish toil : it has gone up to heaven ; and no spirit of prophecy is required to foresee that, unless timely and effectual remedies can be applied, it must, in its inevitable consequences, draw vengeance down.

Cowper's heart was as compassionate as it was gentle. He could not see distress without endeavoring to relieve it. " We do what we can," he writes to Mr. Unwin ; " but that *can* is little. You have rich friends, are eloquent on all occasions, and know how to be pathetic on a proper one. The winter will be severely felt at Olney by many whose sobriety, industry, and honesty, recommend them to charitable notice : and we think we could tell such persons as Mr. Bouverie, or Mr. Smith, half a dozen tales of distress

that would find their way into hearts as feeling as theirs. You will do as you see good ; and we, in the mean time, shall remain convinced that you will do your best. Lady Austen will no doubt do something, for she has great sensibility and compassion.”⁴⁸

The application was successful. In his next letter, Cowper says, “My dear William, on the part of the poor, and on our part, be pleased to make acknowledgments, such as the occasion calls for, to our beneficent friend Mr. Smith.⁴⁹ I call him ours, because, having experienced his kindness to myself in a former instance, and in the present his disinterested readiness to succor the distressed, my ambition will be satisfied with nothing less. He may depend upon the strictest secrecy ; no creature shall hear him mentioned either now or hereafter, as the person from whom we have received this bounty. But when I speak of him, or hear him spoken of by others, which sometimes happens, I shall not forget what is due to so rare a character. I wish, and your mother wishes it too, that he could sometimes take us in his way to Nottingham ; he will find us happy to receive a person whom we must needs account it an honor to know. We shall exercise our best discretion in the disposal of the money ; but in this town, where the gospel has been preached so many years, where the people have been favored so long with laborious and conscientious ministers, it is not an easy thing to find those who make no profession of religion at all, and are yet proper objects of charity. The profane are so profane, so drunken, dissolute, and in every respect worthless, that to make them partakers of his bounty would be to abuse it. We promise, however, that none shall touch it but such as are miserably poor, yet at the same time industrious and honest, two characters frequently united here, where the most watchful and unremitting labor will hardly procure them bread. We make none but the cheapest laces, and the price of them is fallen almost to nothing. Thanks are due to yourself likewise, and are hereby accordingly rendered, for waving your claim in behalf of your own parishioners. You are always

⁴⁸ Nov. 4, 1782.

⁴⁹ Afterwards Lord Carrington.

with them, and they are always, at least some of them, the better for your residence among them. Olney is a populous place, inhabited chiefly by the half-starved and the ragged of the earth, and it is not possible for our small party and small ability to extend their operations so far as to be much felt among such numbers. Accept, therefore, your share of their gratitude, and be convinced that when they pray for a blessing upon those who have relieved their wants, He that answers that prayer, and when he answers it, will remember his servant at Stock."

Fifty years have cancelled the obligation of silence which was then imposed, and the good which was done in secret may and ought to be proclaimed now upon the house-top. The disposal of Mr. Smith's bounty led to some interchange of letters between him and Cowper. "We corresponded," says the latter, "as long as the occasion required, and then ceased. Charmed with his good sense, politeness, and liberality to the poor, I was indeed ambitious of continuing a correspondence with him, and told him so. Perhaps I had done more prudently had I never proposed it. But warm hearts are not famous for wisdom, and mine was too warm to be very considerate on such an occasion. I have not heard from him since, and have long given up all expectation of it. I know he is too busy a man to have leisure for me, and I ought to have recollected it sooner. He found time to do much good, and to employ us as his agents in doing it, and that might have satisfied me. Though laid under the strictest injunctions of secrecy, both by him and by you on his behalf, I consider myself as under no obligation to conceal from you the remittances he made. Only, in my turn, I beg leave to request secrecy on your part, because, intimate as you are with him, and highly as he values you, I cannot yet be sure that the communication would please him, his delicacies on this subject being as singular as his benevolence. He sent forty pounds, twenty at a time. Olney has not had such a friend as this many a day; nor has there been an instance, at any time, of a few families so effectually relieved, or so completely encouraged to the pursuit of that honest industry, by which, their debts being paid, and the parents and children com-

fortably clothed, they are now enabled to maintain themselves. Their labor was almost in vain before; but now it answers; it earns them bread, and all their other wants are plentifully supplied."

Notwithstanding the character of the population, and the situation of his house, which was neither pleasant nor convenient, Cowper was strongly attached to the spot. "The very stones in the garden wall," said he, "are my intimate acquaintance. I should miss almost the minutest object, and be disagreeably affected by its removal: and am persuaded, that were it possible I could leave this incommodious nook for a twelvemonth, I should return to it again with rapture, and be transported with the sight of objects which to all the world beside would be at least indifferent; some of them, perhaps, such as the ragged thatch and the tottering walls of the neighboring cottages, disgusting."⁵⁰ He had not acknowledged, and perhaps had not felt, a want of society till he became acquainted with Lady Austen; then, indeed, he enjoyed it cordially. But this enjoyment was ere long disturbed, and both Lady Austen and Mrs. Unwin appear to me to have been wronged by the causes assigned for its disturbance. Lady Austen has been represented as having entertained a hope of marrying Cowper, and Mrs. Unwin as so jealous on that account, that he found it necessary, in consideration of his earlier friend, to break off all connection with the latter one.

That there had ever been an engagement of marriage between Cowper and Mrs. Unwin, has already been contradicted. If any such engagement had been formed, there were no prudential considerations (as has been alleged) to prevent it. They lived together upon their joint incomes, and marriage would have made no difference in their expenditure. Mrs. Unwin was forty-three at the time of her husband's death; hers was a maternal friendship for one who stood in need of maternal care, and as such Cowper regarded it. She was now threescore, and as little likely to be jealous of being supplanted in his affections, as Lady Austen was to form the design of marrying a man in

⁵⁰ July 27, 1783.

Cowper's peculiar circumstances, which circumstances she was well acquainted with.

They, however, who, in justice to Lady Austen, reject the notion of any matrimonial project on her part, still impute jealousy to Mrs. Unwin, — jealousy of the ascendancy acquired over Cowper by one who, being possessed of great wit and vivacity, both enlivened his spirits and stimulated his genius. Mr. Scott is reported to have said upon the subject, "Who can be surprised that two women should be continually in the society of one man, and quarrel sooner or later with each other?" It was not long before two women were continually in the society of this very man, and never quarrelled with each other; and Mrs. Unwin, who was one, is thus spoken of by the other: "She is very far from grave; on the contrary she is cheerful and gay, and laughs *de bon cœur* upon the smallest provocation. Amidst all the little puritanical words, which fall from her *de tems en tems*, she seems to have by nature a great fund of gayety; — great indeed must it have been, not to have been totally overcome by the close confinement in which she has lived, and the anxiety she must have undergone for one whom she certainly loves as well as one human being can love another. I will not say she idolizes him, because that she would think wrong; but she certainly seems to possess the truest regard and affection for this excellent creature, and, as I before said, has, in the most literal sense of those words, no will, or shadow of inclination, but what is *his*. My account of Mrs. Unwin may seem, perhaps, to you, on comparing my letters, contradictory; but when you consider that I began to write at the moment, and at the first moment that I saw her, you will not wonder. Her character develops itself by degrees; and though I might lead you to suppose her grave and melancholy, she is not so by any means. When she speaks upon grave subjects, she does express herself with a puritanical tone, and in puritanical expressions, but on all other subjects she seems to have a great disposition to cheerfulness and mirth; and indeed, had she not, she could not have gone through all she has. I must say, too, that she seems to be very well read in the English poets, as appears by several little

quotations, which she makes from time to time, and has a true taste for what is excellent in that way. There is something truly affectionate and sincere in her manner. No one can express more heartily than she does, her joy to have me at Olney ; and as this must be for his sake, it is an additional proof of her regard and esteem for him."⁵¹

Mrs. Unwin's faculties were at this time unimpaired ; there was no want of cheerfulness or vivacity in her : and she, too, had enlivened the spirits of Cowper, and animated his genius. The causes which broke up their intimacy with Lady Austen, were the same which had formerly suspended it. The fact was thus announced in a letter to Mr. Unwin : "You are going to Bristol. A lady, not long since our very near neighbor, is probably there ; she *was* there very lately. If you should chance to fall into her company, remember, if you please, that we found the connection, on some accounts, an inconvenient one ; that we do not wish to renew it ; and conduct yourself accordingly. A character with which we spend all our time should be made on purpose for us : too much or too little of any single ingredient spoils all. In the instance in question, the dissimilitude was too great not to be felt continually, and consequently made our intercourse unpleasant. We have reason, however, to believe that she has given up all thoughts of a return to Olney."⁵²

The circumstances which rendered this intimacy irksome, and finally dissolved it, Cowper afterwards stated in a letter to Lady Hesketh, wherein, to explain what interruptions had delayed him in the progress of the Task, he thus gives an account of the rise and termination of this memorable friendship. "There came a lady into this country, by name and title Lady Austen, the widow of the late Sir Robert Austen. At first, she lived with her sister, about

⁵¹ On this extract from a letter of Lady Hesketh's, Mr. Croft observes, that that lady, "having lived much in the world, and amongst the highest circles, was fully competent to discover the characters of others ; and it may, therefore, be concluded, that the pleasing description she gave of Mrs. Unwin was a true one ; and that her faults would not have escaped the notice of one so well acquainted with human nature."

⁵² July 12, 1784.

a mile from Olney ; but in a few weeks took lodgings at the vicarage here. Between the vicarage and the back of our house, are interposed our garden, an orchard, and the garden belonging to the vicarage. She had lived much in France, was very sensible, and had infinite vivacity. She took a great liking to us, and we to her. She had been used to a great deal of company ; and we, fearing that she would find such a transition into silent retirement irksome, contrived to give her our agreeable company often. Becoming continually more and more intimate, a practice obtained at length of our dining with each other alternately, every day, Sundays excepted. In order to facilitate our communication, we made doors in the two garden walls⁵³ abovesaid, by which means we considerably shortened the way from one house to the other, and could meet when we pleased, without entering the town at all ; a measure the rather expedient, because the town is abominably dirty, and she kept no carriage. On her first settlement in our neighborhood, I made it my own particular business, (for at that time I was not employed in writing, having published my first volume, and not begun my second,) to pay my devoirs to her ladyship every morning at eleven. Customs very soon become laws. I began the Task ; for she was the lady who gave me the Sofa for a subject. Being once engaged in the work, I began to feel the inconvenience of my morning attendance. We had seldom breakfasted ourselves till ten ; and the intervening hour was all the time that I could find in the whole day for writing ; and occasionally it would happen that the half of that hour was all that I could secure for the purpose. But there was no remedy. Long usage had made that which at first was optional, a point of good manners, and consequently of necessity, and I was forced to neglect the Task, to attend upon the Muse who had inspired the subject. But she had

⁵³ Hayley (i. 306) says that Mr. Newton opened this communication when he occupied the parsonage ; and Lady Austen had the advantage of it. I followed his statement, not recollecting what is said here. Probably Hayley has made no mistake, and Cowper means that it had been reopened after having long been disused. Minute accuracy was unimportant, and he was writing as succinctly as he could.

ill health,⁵⁴ and before I had quite finished the work, was obliged to repair to Bristol. Thus, as I told you, my dear, the cause of the many interruptions that I mentioned, was removed, and now, except the Bull that I spoke of, we have seldom any company at all. After all that I have said upon this matter, you will not completely understand me, perhaps, unless I account for the remainder of the day. I will add, therefore, that having paid my morning visit, I walked; returning from my walk, I dressed; we then met and dined, and parted not till between ten and eleven at night!"⁵⁵

The Bull, thus playfully mentioned, was the person to whose benevolent attention Mr. Newton had consigned him,

⁵⁴ Lady Austen died while Hayley's *Life of Cowper* was in the press. If she had lived to peruse it, she would probably have corrected some of the mistakes upon this subject, into which he had fallen. It appears by the extracts which are now before the reader, (and they are not partial extracts, but comprise the whole that is said concerning it,) that the same causes which led to an interruption of her friendship with Cowper, finally dissolved it. Love was out of the question in her case; jealousy equally so in Mrs. Unwin's; and though Cowper had "fallen in friendship" with her at first sight, and addressed complimentary verses to her, these from a man advanced some way on the road from fifty to threescore, were not likely to be mistaken by a woman who knew the world, and was, moreover, well acquainted with his peculiar circumstances.

Mr. Knox says, in his correspondence with the late excellent Bishop Jebb,* that he had a severer idea of Lady Austen than he should wish to put into writing for publication, and that he almost suspected she was a very artful woman. When I find myself differing in opinion from Mr. Knox, I distrust my own judgment. But, in this instance, it appears that his correspondent thought he had judged harshly, and I do not see what object an artful woman could possibly have had in view.

It may be said that Hayley makes jealousy the cause of the separation, and represents Lady Austen as having hoped that Cowper would marry her, and that he derived his information from Lady Austen herself. To this I reply, that the latter part of the statement is merely what Hayley inferred from the former, and the former may thus be explained. Lady Austen exacted attentions which it became inconvenient and irksome to pay, — or, perhaps, in Cowper's morbid state of sensitiveness, he fancied that she exacted them. He is not likely to have stated this so explicitly in his letter to her, as he did to Mr. Unwin and Lady Hesketh. Lady Austen herself may never have suspected it; and by imputing jealousy to Mrs. Unwin, she accounted to herself and to Hayley for what must otherwise have appeared unaccountable to her.

⁵⁵ Jan. 16, 1786.

* Vol. i. p. 276.

on his removal from Olney ; *Carissime Taurorum* Cowper sometimes addressed him in his letters. He was indeed a man after his own heart. "You are not acquainted with him," he says to Mr. Unwin ; "perhaps it is as well for you that you are not. You would regret still more than you do, that there are so many miles interposed between us. He spends part of the day with us to-morrow. A dissenter, but a liberal one ; a man of letters and of genius ; a master of a fine imagination, or rather not master of it, — an imagination, which, when he finds himself in the company he loves, and can confide in, runs away with him into such fields of speculation, as amuse and enliven every other imagination that has the happiness to be of the party ; at other times he has a tender and delicate sort of melancholy in his disposition, not less agreeable in its way. No men are better qualified for companions in such a world as this, than men of such a temperament. Every scene of life has two sides, a dark and a bright one, and the mind that has an equal mixture of melancholy and vivacity is, best of all, qualified for the contemplation of either. He can be lively without levity, and pensive without dejection. Such a man is Mr. Bull. But — he smokes tobacco — nothing is perfect ! —

*Nihil est ab omni
Parte beatum.*

Before Cowper began the Task, Mr. Bull put into his hands Madame Guyon's poetical works, and requested him to translate a few of them, "partly," he says, "to amuse a solitary hour, partly to keep in exercise the genius of this incomparable man." A month's leisure was devoted to them, and they were presented to Mr. Bull, to make what use of them he pleased. This friend sometime afterwards suggested that they should be printed ;⁵⁶ Cowper undertook to revise them for this purpose, but various circumstances prevented him from ever carrying the intention into effect. Mr. Bull probably thought that the strain of her poetry

⁵⁶ He seems to have contemplated this at first, by the dedication to his friend, which was sent with the manuscript.

would rather soothe his mind than agitate it, and induce a sane state of religious feeling. But perhaps the passages on which Cowper brooded most were those that he could apply, when taken apart from the context, to his own imaginary condition.

My claim to life, though sought with earnest care,
No light within me, or without me shows ;
Once I had faith ; but now in self-despair
Find my chief cordial, and my best repose.

My soul is a forgotten thing ; she sinks,
Sinks and is lost, without a wish to rise ;
Feels an indifference she abhors, and thinks
Her name erased forever from the skies.⁵⁷

Cowper, however, explained to Mr. Newton how it was that he could treat upon subjects in verse, which he trembled to approach in prose. "There is a difference," said he. "The search after poetical expression, the rhyme, and the numbers, are all affairs of some difficulty ; they arrive, indeed, but are not to be attained without study, and engross, perhaps, a larger share of the attention than the subject itself. Persons fond of music will sometimes find pleasure in the tune, when the words afford them none."⁵⁸

From the letter wherein he told Mr. Bull that these translations were finished, it appears that his friend had reasoned with him upon his case ; and the answer expresses a miserable assurance of utter desertion. "Both your advice," he says, "and your manner of giving it, are gentle and friendly and like yourself. I thank you for them, and do not refuse your counsel because it is not good, or be-

⁵⁷ The extreme freedom of the translation seems to show that he intended a self-application here ;

*Si vous me demandez ce que je crois de moi,
Je n'en connois aucune chose :
Jadis je vivois par la foi,
C'est dans le rien que je repose.*

*Un neant malheureux, qui ne demande pas
Qu'on lui fasse changer de place ;
Etat pire que le tropas,
Et qui n'attend jamais de grace.*

Vol. iii. Cantique 69.

⁵⁸ March 19, 1784.

cause I dislike it, but because it is not for me. There is not a man upon earth that might not be the better for it, myself only excepted. Prove to me that I have a right to pray, and I will pray without ceasing; yea, and pray, too, even in 'the belly of this hell,' compared with which Jonah's was a palace,—a temple of the living God! But let me add, there is no encouragement in the Scripture so comprehensive as to include my case, nor any consolation so effectual as to reach it. I do not relate it to you, because you could not believe it; you would agree with me if you could. And yet the sin by which I am excluded from the privileges I once enjoyed, you would account no sin; you would tell me that it was a duty. This is strange;—you will think me mad;—but I am not mad, most noble Festus! I am only in despair; and those powers of mind which I possess, are only permitted to me for my amusement at some times, and to acuminate and enhance my misery at others. I have not even asked a blessing upon my food these ten years, nor do I expect that I shall ever ask it again.—Yet, I love you, and such as you, and determine to enjoy your friendship while I can:—it will not be long; we must soon part forever."⁵⁹

He seldom touched upon this string in his letters to any one except Mr. Newton. "I am well in body," he says to him, "but with a mind that would wear out a frame of adamant; yet upon my frame, which is not very robust, its effects are not discernible. Mrs. Unwin is in health!"⁶⁰—"We think of you often, and one of us prays for you; the other will, when he can pray for himself!"⁶¹ Writing in the second week of January, he entered at once upon this dismal strain.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Jan. 13, 1784.

The new year is already old in my account. I am not, indeed, sufficiently second-sighted to be able to boast by anticipation an acquaintance with the events of it yet unborn, but rest convinced that, be they what they may, not one of them comes a messenger of good to me. If even

⁵⁹ Oct. 27, 1783.⁶⁰ Feb. 24, 1783.⁶¹ Feb. 8.

death itself should be of the number, he is no friend of mine. It is an alleviation of the woes even of an unenlightened man, that he can wish for death, and indulge a hope, at least, that in death he shall find deliverance. But, loaded as my life is with despair, I have no such comfort as would result from a supposed probability of better things to come, were it once ended. For, more unhappy than the traveller with whom I set out, pass through what difficulties I may, through whatever dangers and afflictions, I am not a whit the nearer home, unless a dungeon may be called so. This is no very agreeable theme; but in so great a dearth of subjects to write upon, and especially impressed as I am at this moment with a sense of my own condition, I could choose no other. The weather is an exact emblem of my mind in its present state. A thick fog envelops every thing, and at the same time it freezes intensely. You will tell me that this cold gloom will be succeeded by a cheerful spring, and endeavor to encourage me to hope for a spiritual change resembling it;—but it will be lost labor. Nature revives again; but a soul once slain lives no more. The hedge that has been apparently dead, is not so; it will burst into leaf and blossom at the appointed time; but no such time is appointed for the stake that stands in it. It is as dead as it seems, and will prove itself no dissembler. The latter end of next month will complete a period of eleven years in which I have spoke no other language. It is a long time for a man, whose eyes were once opened, to spend in darkness; long enough to make despair an inveterate habit; and such it is in me. My friends, I know, expect that I shall see yet again. They think it necessary to the existence of divine truth, that he who once had possession of it should never finally lose it. I admit the solidity of this reasoning in every case but my own. And why not in my own? For causes which to them it appears madness to allege, but which rest upon my mind with a weight of immovable conviction. If I am recoverable, why am I thus? why crippled and made useless in the church, just at that time of life, when, my judgment and experience being matured, I might be most useful? why cashiered and turned out of service, till, according to the course of nature, there

is not life enough left in me to make amends for the years I have lost ; till there is no reasonable hope left that the fruit can ever pay the expense of the fallow ? I forestall the answer :—God's ways are mysterious, and he giveth no account of his matters :—an answer that would serve my purpose as well as theirs that use it. There is a mystery in my destruction, and in time it shall be explained.

Yours,

W. C.

Mr. Newton, for the purpose of discouraging this strain, said to him, that as he conversed upon other subjects than despair, he might write upon others. "Indeed, my friend," Cowper replied, "I am a man of very little conversation upon any subject. From that of despair I abstain as much as possible, for the sake of my company ; but I will venture to say that it is never out of my mind one minute in the whole day. I do not mean to say that I am never cheerful. I am often so : always indeed when my nights have been undisturbed for a season. But the effect of such continual listening to the language of a heart hopeless and deserted, is, that I can never give much more than half my attention to what is started by others, and very rarely start any thing myself. My silence, however, and my absence of mind make me sometimes as entertaining as if I had wit. They furnish an occasion for friendly and good-natured raillery ; they raise a laugh, and I partake of it."⁶²

It is consolatory to believe that during this long stage of his malady, Cowper was rarely so miserable as he represented himself to be when speaking of his own case. That no one ought to be pronounced happy before the last scene is over, has been said of old in prose and in verse, and the common feeling of mankind accords with the saying ; for our retrospect of any individual's history is colored by the fortune of his latter days, as a drama takes its character from the catastrophe. A melancholy sentiment will always for this reason prevail when Cowper is thought of. But though his disease of mind settled at last into the deepest shade, and ended in the very blackness of darkness,

⁶² March 19, 1784.

it is not less certain that, before it reached that point, it allowed him many years of moral and intellectual enjoyment. They who have had most opportunity of observing and studying madness in all its mysterious forms, and in all its stages, know that the same degree of mental suffering is not produced by imaginary causes of distress as by real ones. Violent emotions, and outbreaks of ungovernable anger are at times easily excited, but not anguish of mind, not that abiding grief which eats into the heart. The distress, even when the patient retains, like Cowper, the full use of reason upon all other points, is in this respect like that of a dream,—a dream, indeed, from which the sufferer can neither wake, nor be awakened; but it pierces no deeper, and there seems to be the same dim consciousness of its unreality.⁶³

After the recurrence of his disease in 1773, his friends appear to have acted judiciously towards him. So long as Mr. Newton resided at Olney, Mrs. Unwin would act implicitly under his advice, and after his departure her own good sense led her to pursue the same quiet, expectant course. Whether they had perceived or not that Cowper's constitution could not bear devotional excitement, was of little consequence while he fancied himself inhibited from all exercises of devotion; and to have reasoned with him upon the single point on which his reason was deranged, would have been to act unreasonably themselves. Argument to a mind thus diseased is of no more avail than food to a sick stomach incapable of retaining it. When Mr. Newton touched on the subject in his letters, it was like feeling his pulse from time to time, and always in a way to encourage an expectation of recovery. Mrs. Unwin, meantime, contented herself with a patient hope, and it is evident that Cowper had some comfort in knowing this hope was confidently and constantly maintained. This

⁶³ These remarks are not merely speculative. They are the result of observation, in the case of an old friend, whose intellectual powers were of a very high order, and the type of whose malady at that time very much resembled Cowper's. He resembled him also in this respect, that when in company with persons who were not informed of his condition, no one could descry in him the slightest appearance of a deranged mind.

comfort he had during those years, when at the worst ; and it gained strength as his manner of life became more social.

No man had been more accustomed than he was to that kind of society which brings the intellectual powers into full play. So many youths of distinguished talent were never at any other time contemporaries at Westminster, as in Cowper's days ; and when he was removed from that daily and hourly intercourse with his peers to a solicitor's office, it was his fortune there to find in a fellow-clerk one who was not inferior to the ablest of them. Thurlow, whom Sir Egerton Brydges calls "the surly, sarcastic, contradictory, old ruler of the courts," had not then contracted any of the callousness of professional and political life. He was in those days as much disposed to sportiveness as Cowper himself, and brought to it those ready talents and that force of mind which afterwards commanded the respect of Dr. Johnson. "It is when you come close to a man in conversation," said that great conversationist, "that you discover what his real abilities are ; to make a speech in a public assembly is a knack. I honor Thurlow, sir ; Thurlow is a fine fellow ; he fairly puts his mind to yours." And on another occasion he said, "I would prepare myself for no man in England, but Lord Thurlow. When I am to meet with him, I should wish to know a day before." And when Cowper left the office, and became master of his own time, no where could he have found more lively companions than the members of his own club and their associates. It was after having been "enlivened by the witty sallies of Thornton, Wilkes, Churchill, and Lloyd," that Boswell, who had passed the morning with them, "boldly,"—in his own words, "repaired to Dr. Johnson's chambers, for his first visit, and found the giant in his den."

Yet Cowper, who, during so many years, had mixed with such companions on equal terms, and till a time of life in which habits take so strong a hold that they are not easily cast off, had great capabilities for solitude. He could have been contented in a hermitage, if his mind had been delivered from the one illusion that oppressed it. There was an activity in his disposition, like that of a happy child, who having no playmate, is left to devise amusement for

itself. As soon as he began to recover, his first care had been to seek employment, and this he found in carpentering, in cage-making, in gardening, and in drawing, till he discovered "that writing, and especially poetry, was the best remedy for that distress from which he sought to escape!" Many persons have brought on insanity by indulging in habits which excite its predisposing causes, and after temporary recoveries have induced a fresh access by the same imprudence; but Cowper's admirable self-management during the intervals which it pleased Providence to vouchsafe, is not the least remarkable point in his extraordinary case.

Yet, though he could bear shade and retirement, he felt that it was good for him to be sometimes in the sunshine of society, and well understood the value of those aids to cheerfulness which come to us from without, or from a distance. "You do well," said he to Unwin, "to make your letters merry ones, though not very merry yourself, and that both for my sake and your own; for your own sake, because it sometimes happens that by assuming an air of cheerfulness, we become cheerful in reality; and for mine, because I have always more need of a laugh than a cry, being somewhat disposed to melancholy by natural temperament as well as by other causes."⁶⁴ It was one of the felicitous incidents of his life that the loss of Lady Austen's society was in some degree immediately supplied by a new acquaintance, which in no long time improved into familiarity, and then ripened into friendship. The Throckmortons had a mansion at Weston. Hitherto Cowper had had no intercourse with the family during the many years that he had resided at Olney; but he had been favored with a key of their pleasure-grounds; and when a new possessor, whom he remembered a boy, came, on the death of an elder brother, to reside there with his wife, he sent a complimentary card, and requested a continuance of the privilege he had enjoyed by the favor of his mother, that lady, on the change of possessors, going to finish her days at Bath.⁶⁵ The request was readily granted, and nothing

⁶⁴ May 8, 1784.

⁶⁵ Sir Robert Throckmorton, the head of the family, then in his

more passed between them for about two years. But even as the lion is proverbially said to be not so fierce as his picture, so a shy man is seldom so shy as his neighbors suppose him to be, when he has once obtained a character for shyness. Deterred by that character from seeking the acquaintance of one whom, in other respects, he already knew how to appreciate, Mr. Throckmorton made no advances till an opportunity offered, in which it might have appeared discourteous not to notice him. Balloons were then the wonder of the day; all the country was invited to see one ascend from Weston, and a special invitation came to Cowper and Mrs. Unwin.

The very feeling in which shyness originates, makes the individual more sensible of any civilities that have an air of sincerity and kindness. "Our reception," says Cowper, "was flattering to a great degree, insomuch that more notice seemed to be taken of us than we could possibly have expected, indeed rather more than any of the other guests; they even seemed anxious to recommend themselves to our regards. We drank chocolate, and were asked to dine, but were engaged."⁶⁶ "It is not possible to conceive a more engaging and agreeable character than the gentleman's, or a more consummate assemblage of all that is called good-nature, complaisance, and innocent cheerfulness than is to be seen in the lady. They have lately received many gross affronts from the people of the place, on account of their religion. We thought it therefore the more necessary to treat them with respect."⁶⁷ — "A day or two after, Mrs. Unwin and I walked that way, and were overtaken in a shower. I found a tree that I thought would shelter us both, a large elm, in a grove that fronts the mansion. Mrs. T. observed us, and running towards us in the rain, insisted on our walking in. He was gone out. We sat chatting with her till the weather cleared up, and then at her instance took a walk with her in the garden. The garden is

eighty-fourth year, resided in Oxfordshire. Though a Romanist, he had "done great things to preserve and restore Buckland (his parish) church." — *Nichols's Literary Anecdotes*, vol. iii. p. 700.

Cowper's friend succeeded to the baronetcy in 1791.

⁶⁶ To Mr. Unwin.

⁶⁷ To Mr. Newton, May 10, 1784.

almost their only walk, and is certainly their only retreat, in which they are not liable to interruption. She offered us a key of it in a manner that made it impossible not to accept it, and said she would send us one: a few days afterwards, in the cool of the evening, we walked that way again. We saw them going toward the house, and exchanged bows and courtesies at a distance, but did not join them. In a few minutes, when we had passed the house, and had almost reached the gate that opens out of the park into the adjoining field, I heard the iron gate belonging to the court-yard ring, and saw Mr. T. advancing hastily toward us; we made equal haste to meet him, he presented to us the key, which I told him I esteemed a singular favor, and after a few such speeches as are made on such occasions, we parted. This happened about a week ago. I concluded nothing less, than that all this civility and attention was designed, on their part, as a prelude to a nearer acquaintance; but here at present the matter rests. I should like exceedingly to be on an easy footing there, to give a morning call now and then, and to receive one, but nothing more. For, though he is one of the most agreeable men I ever saw, I could not wish to visit him in any other way; neither our house, furniture, servants, or income, being such as qualify us to make entertainments; neither would I on any account be introduced to the neighboring gentry."

The intercourse, however, proceeded farther than Cowper anticipated. He soon found himself a favorite visitor at Weston Hall, and for that reason was a frequent one. Incidents connected with the family led him to compose several of those minor pieces that give so much pleasure in the little circles for which they are designed, and on which the reputation of such a writer stamps a value when they are made current in the world of literature. In the easy intercourse of growing intimacy, Mr. and Mrs. Throckmorton became Mr. and Mrs. Frog, and by that inevitable name have obtained a more lasting remembrance in Cowper's letters than could have been conferred on them by a ducal title.

CHAPTER XI.

COWPER AT OLNEY. JOHN GILPIN RENDERED POPULAR BY HENDERSON'S RECITATION. PUBLICATION OF THE TASK. RENEWAL OF INTERCOURSE WITH LADY HESKETH.

THE Task meantime was finished,—that monument which, though not loftier than the pyramids, will more surely perpetuate its author's name, than those eldest of human works have handed down the history of their founders. It was transcribed in the autumn of 1784, and sent to Mr. Unwin for his perusal. "I know," said Cowper, "you will lose no time in reading it; but I must beg you likewise to lose none in consigning it to Johnson, that if he chooses to print it, it may go to the press immediately; if not, that it may be offered directly to your friend Longman, or any other. Not that I doubt Johnson's acceptance of it, for he will find it more *ad captum populi* than the former."¹

Unwin's opinion of the work relieved Cowper from some anxiety, and gave him "a good deal of positive pleasure." "I have faith in your judgment," said he, "and an implicit confidence in the sincerity of your approbation. The writing of so long a poem is a serious business, and the author must know little of his own heart who does not in some degree suspect himself of partiality to his own production: and who is he that would not be mortified by the discovery that he had written five thousand lines in vain? If, when you make the offer of my book to Johnson, he should stroke his chin, and look up to the ceiling and cry—'Humph!'—anticipate him (I beseech you) at once, by saying—'that you know I should be sorry that he should undertake for me to his own disadvantage, or that my volume should be in any degree pressed upon him. I make him the offer merely because I think he would have reason to complain of me, if I did not.'—But that punctilio once satisfied, it is a matter of indifference to me what publisher sends me forth. If Longman should have difficulties, which is the more

¹ Sept. 11, 1784.

probable, as I understand from you, that he does not in these cases see with his own eyes, but will consult a brother poet, take no pains to conquer them. The idea of being hawked about, and especially of your being the hawk, is insupportable. Nichols (I have heard) is the most learned printer of the present day. He may be a man of taste as well as learning; and I suppose that you would not want a gentleman usher to introduce you. He prints the Gentleman's Magazine, and may serve us if the others should decline; if not, give yourself no further trouble about the matter. I may possibly envy authors who can afford to publish at their own expense, and in that case should write no more. But the mortification would not break my heart."²

The first offer, however, was accepted. "I am glad for your sake," says Cowper to his friend, "that you succeeded in the first instance, and that the first trouble proved the last. Willing, too, to consider Johnson's readiness to accept a second volume of mine as an argument that at least he was no loser by the former, I collect from it some reasonable hope that the volume in question may not wrong him neither. My imagination tells me (for I know you interest yourself in the success of my productions) that your heart fluttered when you approached his door, and that it felt itself discharged of a burden when you came out again."³

And now, when the poem was in Johnson's hands, he mentioned it to Mr. Newton; not having done so sooner, he said, because almost to the last he had been doubtful whether he should ever bring it to a conclusion, working often in such distress of mind, as, while it spurred him to the work, at the same time threatened to disqualify him for it. To Mr. Unwin he said, "Mr. Newton will be surprised, and, perhaps, not pleased; but I think he cannot complain, for he keeps his own authorly secrets without participating them with me. I do not think myself in the least injured by his reserve; neither should I, if he were to publish a whole library without favoring me with any previous notice of his intentions. In these cases it is no violation of the

² Oct. 20, 1784.

³ Nov. 1, 1784.

laws of friendship not to communicate, though there must be a friendship where the communication is made. But many reasons may concur in disposing a writer to keep his work secret, and none of them injurious to his friends. The influence of one I have felt myself, for which none of them would blame me—I mean the desire of surprising agreeably. And if I have denied myself this pleasure in your instance, it was only to give myself a greater, by eradicating from your mind any little weeds of suspicion that might still remain in it, that any man living is dearer to me than yourself. Had not this consideration forced up the lid of my strong-box like a lever, it would have kept its contents with an invisible closeness to the last; and the first news that either you or any of my friends would have heard of the Task, they would have received from the public papers. But you know now, that, neither as a poet, nor as a man, do I give to any man a precedence in my estimation at your expense.”⁴

The jealousy, here foreseen, was felt and expressed. “The moment Mr. Newton knew,” says Cowper, (“and I took care that he should learn it first from me,) that I had communicated to you what I had concealed from him, and that you were my authorship’s go-between with Johnson on this occasion, he sent me a most friendly letter indeed, but one in every line of which I could hear the soft murmurs of something like mortification, that could not be entirely suppressed. It contained nothing, however, that you yourself would have blamed, or that I had not every reason to consider as evidence of his regard to me. He concluded the subject with desiring to know something of my plan, to be favored with an extract by way of specimen, or (which he should like better still) with wishing me to order Johnson to send him a proof as fast as they were printed off. Determining not to accede to this last request, for many reasons, (but especially because I would no more show my poem piecemeal, than I would my house if I had one; the merits of the structure, in either case, being equally liable to suffer by such a partial view of it,) I have endeavored to compromise the difference between us, and to satisfy

⁴ Oct. 30.

him without disgracing myself. The proof-sheets I have absolutely, though civilly refused : but I have sent him a copy of the arguments of each book, more dilated and circumstantial than those inserted in the work ; and to these I have added an extract, as he desired ; selecting, as most suited to his taste—The view of the restoration of all things—which you recollect to have seen near the end of the last book. I hold it necessary to tell you this, lest, if you should call upon him, he should startle you by discovering a degree of information upon the subject which you could not otherwise know how to reconcile, or to account for.”⁵

Mr. Newton appears to have objected to the blank verse in which the *Task* was written, and to the title of the poem, and to have intimated no favorable expectation of its success. Cowper answered all his objections without deferring to any ; and with regard to its fortune with the public, he said, “At any rate, though as little apt to be sanguine as most men, and more prone to fear and despond than to overrate my own productions, I am persuaded that I shall not forfeit any thing by this volume that I gained by the last.” To Mr. Unwin he says, “I have had a letter from Mr. Newton that did not please me, and returned an answer to it that possibly may not have pleased him. We shall come together again soon, I suppose, upon as amicable terms as usual ; but at present he is in a state of mortification. He would have been pleased had the book passed out of his hands into yours, or even out of yours into his, so that he had previously had opportunity to advise a measure which I pursued without his recommendation, and had seen the poems in manuscript. But my design was to pay you a whole compliment, and I have done it. If he says more on the subject, I shall speak freely, and perhaps please him less than I have done already.”⁶

While the *Task* was in the press, John Gilpin was gaining a wide reputation for its then unknown author. This lively story, in its newspaper form, came into the hands of Mr. Richard Sharp, well known afterwards in the

⁵ Nov. 29, 1784.

⁶ Dec. 18, 1784.

literary and higher circles of society, for his conversational talents, and recently by a volume of *Essays and Poems*, the careful compositions of his middle age, which he published at the close of a long life. Mr. Sharp was intimately acquainted with Henderson, the great actor of those days, and the only one who has resembled Garrick in versatility of power; his Falstaff, his Benedict, and his Mr. Bayes having been not less finished performances than his Shylock, his Hamlet, and his King John. Henderson was at that time delivering public recitations at Freemason's Hall; "It was my lucky chance," says Mr. Sharp,⁷ "to make him acquainted with John Gilpin, and to propose his reading it. Yet, to be honest, I must own that I did not anticipate the prodigious effect of that story, when the public attention was directed to it."

These readings were given in conjunction with Sheridan, son of Swift's immortalized friend, and father of Brinsley Sheridan. The terms of admission were thought high; nevertheless the experiment succeeded, and though it continued only during the Lent of one year, the profits amounted to eight hundred pounds. The room was crowded upon every performance, and this success was attributed much more to John Gilpin than to the serious part of the recitations. Henderson was unrivalled as a reader, and for this reason, that he had neither studied nor formed for himself any system of elocution. He was once addressed,

⁷ My last communication with Mr. Sharp was upon this subject. Our intercourse, which was thus closed by a communication relating to the literary history of Cowper, commenced nearly forty years before, upon a morning visit to Cowper's publisher, then in the Rules of the King's Bench, under sentence of imprisonment, for having published a pamphlet by Gilbert Wakefield, which had been pronounced a seditious libel. From the commencement of my residence at Keswick, (1803,) till the close of the war, Mr. Sharp continued his custom of making an annual journey to the Lakes. He was expected here as regularly as the season, and his society was one of the pleasures which the season brought with it.

In his last note to me, he says, "I rejoice that you have undertaken Cowper's Life. The painful facts are so well known, that you must fairly tell the whole story of his derangement. His poetical character will afford you a choice opportunity of giving your sentiments on the nature of the art, and the value of his departure from the French school, which had exclusive possession of our literature till Percy's *Reliques* appeared."

when he descended from the desk, by a person who wriggled up to him, with "Pray, who *did* teach you to read, Mr. Henderson?" "My mother, sir!" was his reply. One who was present at one of these recitations says, that when John Gilpin was delivered, "the whole audience chuckled; and Mrs. Siddons, who sat next to me,⁸ lifted her unequalled dramatic hands, and clapped as heartily as she herself used to be applauded in the same manner." But the effect was not confined to the overflowing audiences at Freemason's Hall. The ballad, which had then become the town talk, was reprinted from the newspaper, wherein it had lain three years dormant. Gilpin, passing at full stretch by the Bell at Edmonton, was to be seen in all print-shops. One print-seller sold six thousand. What had succeeded so well in London was repeated with inferior ability, but with equal success, on provincial stages, and the ballad became in the highest degree⁹ popular, before the author's name was known.

The first person who communicated to Cowper the intelligence that "the famous horseman" was affording as much amusement to the public as he had formerly given to the little circles at Olney and Stock, seems to have been Mr. Newton. It called forth the following reply:—

⁸ For this anecdote I am beholden to an anonymous correspondent, who, at the age of eighty-five, appears to retain his memory and his cheerfulness in an extraordinary degree.

⁹ I know not whether any writer has disparaged it, except Henderson's biographer, Mr. John Ireland, who says, with especial reference to John Gilpin, that his friend "raised into reputation some things which seemed to have been gathered to the dull of ancient days, and, but for such a renewal, had probably been still covered with the cloak of oblivion."

Some notice, however, this ballad had certainly obtained, before Henderson brought it into vogue. The readings at Freemason's Hall were in 1785, and in the preceding October, Cowper, when writing to Unwin respecting the intended publication of his second volume, says, "I have not been without thoughts of adding John Gilpin at the tail of all. He has made a good deal of noise in the world; and perhaps it may not be amiss to show, that though I write generally with a serious intention, I know how to be occasionally merry. The Critical Reviewers charged me with an attempt at humor. John, having been more celebrated upon the score of humor than most pieces that have appeared in modern days, may serve to exonerate me from the imputation."

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

April 22, 1785.

When I received your account of the great celebrity of John Gilpin, I felt myself both flattered and grieved. Being man, and having in my composition all the ingredients of which other men are made, and vanity among the rest, it pleased me to reflect that I was on a sudden become so famous, and that all the world was busy inquiring after me: but the next moment, recollecting my former self, and that thirteen years ago, as harmless as John's history is, I should not then have written it, my spirits sank, and I was ashamed of my success. Your letter was followed the next post by one from Mr. Unwin. You tell me that I am rivalled by Mrs. Bellamy; and he, that I have a competitor for fame, not less formidable, in the Learned Pig. Alas! what is an author's popularity worth, in a world that can suffer a prostitute on one side, and a pig on the other, to eclipse his brightest glories? I am therefore sufficiently humbled by these considerations; and unless I should hereafter be ordained to engross the public attention by means more magnificent than a song, am persuaded that I shall suffer no real detriment by their applause. I have produced many things, under the influence of despair, which hope would not have permitted to spring. But if the soil of that melancholy, in which I have walked so long, has thrown up here and there an unprofitable fungus, it is well, at least, that it is not chargeable with having brought forth poison. Like you, I see, or think I can see, that Gilpin may have his use. Causes, in appearance trivial, produce often the most beneficial consequences; and perhaps my volumes may now travel to a distance, which, if they had not been ushered into the world by that notable horseman, they would never have reached. Our temper differs somewhat from that of the ancient Jews. They would neither dance nor weep. We indeed weep not, if a man mourn unto us; but I must needs say, that, if he pipe, we seem disposed to dance with the greatest alacrity.

Yours,

W. C.

In a subsequent letter to Mr. Newton, he says, "I should blame nobody, not even my intimate friends, and those who have the most favorable opinion of me, were they to charge the publication of John Gilpin, at the end of so much solemn and serious truth, to the score of the author's vanity; and to suspect that, however sober I may be upon proper occasions, I have yet that itch of popularity that would not suffer me to sink my title to a jest that had been so successful. But the case is not such. When I sent the copy of the *Task* to Johnson, I desired, indeed, Mr. Unwin to ask him the question, whether or not he would choose to make it a part of the volume. This I did merely with a view to promote the sale of it. Johnson answered, 'By all means.' Some months afterward, he enclosed a note to me in one of my packets, in which he expressed a change of mind, alleging, that to print John Gilpin would only be to print what had been hackneyed in every magazine, in every shop, and at the corner of every street. I answered, that I desired to be entirely governed by his opinion; and that if he chose to waive it, I should be better pleased with the omission. Nothing more passed between us upon the subject, and I concluded that I should never have the immortal honor of being generally known as the author of John Gilpin. In the last packet, however, down came John, very fairly printed, and equipped for public appearance. The business having taken this turn, I concluded that Johnson had adopted my original thought, that it might prove advantageous to the sale; and as he had had the trouble and expense of printing it, I corrected the copy, and let it pass."

A little impatience Cowper felt at the tardiness of his publisher's proceedings: "That evil report of his indolence," said he, "reaches me from every body that knows him, and is so general, that had I a work, or the publication of one in hand, the expense of which I intended to take the hazard of upon myself, I should be very much afraid to employ him. He who will neglect himself, cannot well be expected to attend to the interests of another."¹⁰ After an interval of some weeks, he says, "I know not what Johnson is

¹⁰ To Mr. Newton, May, 1785.

about, neither do I now inquire. It will be a month tomorrow since I returned him the last proof. He might, I suppose, have published by this time, without hurrying himself into a fever, or breaking his neck through the violence of his despatch; but having never seen the book advertised, I conclude that he has not. Had the Parliament risen at the usual time, he would have been just too late; and though it sits longer than usual, or is likely to do so, I should not wonder if he were too late at last. Dr. Johnson laughs at Savage¹¹ for charging the still-birth of a poem of his upon the bookseller's delay; yet when Dr. Johnson had a poem of his own to publish, no man ever discovered more anxiety to meet the market. But I have taken thought about it, till I am grown weary of the subject; and at last have placed myself much at my ease upon the cushion of this one resolution, that if ever I have dealings hereafter with my present manager, we will proceed upon other terms."¹²

Cowper had not been discouraged by the reception of his first volume. He told Johnson that he "should watch its success, and determine by the event whether to resume his occupation as an author, or drop it forever."¹³ But to pass the press had been to pass the Rubicon; though no triumph had been obtained by the passage, he took his stand after it as an author. One hope indeed, which was dearer to him than any dream of being "forever known," had been disappointed — the hope of recalling himself to the friendly

¹¹ Cowper's memory deceived him here. Johnson does not laugh at Savage; he says that he "easily reconciled himself to mankind, without imputing any defect to his work, by observing that his poem was unluckily published two days after the prorogation of the Parliament, and by consequence at a time when all those who could be expected to regard it were in the hurry of preparing for their departure, or engaged in taking leave of others, upon their dismissal from public affairs."

There is no laugh at Savage here: the subject of the poem being "Public Spirit with regard to Public Works," the persons whom he might have expected to regard it were those whom the prorogation dispersed. I know not what instance of anxiety in Johnson Cowper alludes to, — most likely it was upon the publication of Irene; the sale of a play generally ends with its novelty, and any delay in publishing after the first night's representation is especially injurious to a short-lived piece.

¹² June 25, 1780.

¹³ Oct. 1, 1781.

remembrance of his old familiar friends. He has said himself that he "was covetous, if ever man was, of living in the remembrance of absentees whom he highly valued and esteemed."¹⁴ But neither Thurlow nor Colman had "thought it worth while" to thank him for his book; and the latter, though he published one himself after it had been sent him, did not "account it necessary to return the compliment." When the *Task* appeared, Cowper allowed himself, therefore, "to be a little pleased with an opportunity of showing them that he resented their treatment, and sent the book to neither."¹⁵ But they were no common men; on his part at least it had been no common friendship, and it may evidently be seen that while resenting even angrily their neglect, he loved them both. His anger passed away with the expression of it; the mournful sentiment remained; and he seems to have thought, like Dr. Johnson when he sent his *Dictionary* into the world, that most of those whom he had once wished to please were lost to him, and in like manner to have dismissed his work "with frigid tranquillity," as if in his gloom of solitude he had little to fear or hope from censure or from praise. That feeling, darkened by his own distempered melancholy, possessed him when he wrote thus to Mr. Newton: —

MY DEAR FRIEND,

August 6, 1785.

I found your account of what you experienced in your state of maiden authorship very entertaining, because very natural. I suppose that no man ever made his first sally from the press without a conviction that all eyes and ears would be engaged to attend him; at least, without a thousand anxieties lest they should not. But, however arduous and interesting such an enterprise may be in the first instance, it seems to me that our feelings on the occasion soon become obtuse. I can answer, at least, for one. Mine are by no means what they were when I published my first volume. I am even so indifferent to the matter, that I can truly assert myself guiltless of the very idea of my book sometimes whole

¹⁴ To Mr. Unwin, Aug. 27, 1785.

¹⁵ To Mr. Newton, July 9, 1785.

days together. God knows that my mind having been occupied more than twelve years in the contemplation of the most distressing subjects, the world, and its opinion of what I write, is become as unimportant to me as the whistling of a bird in a bush. Despair made amusement necessary, and I found poetry the most agreeable amusement. Had I not endeavored to perform my best, it would not have amused me at all. The mere blotting of so much paper would have been but indifferent sport. God gave me grace also to wish that I might not write in vain. Accordingly, I have mingled much truth with much trifle ; and such truths as deserved at least to be clad as well and as handsomely as I could clothe them. If the world approve me not, so much the worse for them, but not for me. I have only endeavored to serve them, and the loss will be their own. And as to their commendations, if I should chance to win them, I feel myself equally invulnerable there. The view that I have had of myself, for many years, has been so truly humiliating, that I think the praises of all mankind could not hurt me. God knows that I speak my present sense of the matter at least most truly, when I say, that the admiration of creatures like myself seems to me a weapon the least dangerous that my worst enemy could employ against me. I am fortified against it by such solidity of real self-abasement, that I deceive myself most egregiously if I do not heartily despise it. Praise belongeth to God ; and I seem to myself to covet it no more than I covet divine honors. Could I assuredly hope that God would at last deliver me, I should have reason to thank him for all that I have suffered, were it only for the sake of this single fruit of my affliction, — that it has taught me how much more contemptible I am in myself than I ever before suspected, and has reduced my former share of self-knowledge (of which at that time I had a tolerable good opinion) to a mere nullity, in comparison with what I have acquired since. Self is a subject of inscrutable misery and mischief, and can never be studied to so much advantage as in the dark ; for as the bright beams of the sun seem to impart a beauty to the foulest objects, and can make even a dunghill smile, so the light of God's countenance, vouchsafed to a fallen creature,

so sweetens him and softens him for the time, that he seems, both to others and to himself, to have nothing savage or sordid about him. But the heart is a nest of serpents, and will be such while it continues to beat. If God cover the mouth of that nest with his hand, they are hush and snug; but if he withdraw his hand, the whole family lift up their heads and hiss, and are as active and venomous as ever. This I always professed to believe from the time that I had embraced the truth, but never knew it as I know it now. To what end I have been made to know it as I do, whether for the benefit of others or for my own, or for both, or for neither, will appear hereafter.

The first encouragement which he received was from his old schoolfellow Lord Dartmouth, to whom he had sent the volume. He had read only a part of it; of that part, however, says Cowper, he expresses himself in terms with which my authorship has abundant cause to be satisfied, and adds that the specimen has made him impatient for the whole. He had ordered a copy also to Mr. Bacon, the sculptor, who, being a friend of Mr. Newton's, and an admirer of his first volume, had made himself known to Cowper by sending him a print of Lord Chatham's monument. The poet had been greatly pleased with it: "I have most of the monuments in the Abbey by heart," he says, "but I recollect none that ever gave me so much pleasure;" and while this impression was yet warm, he introduced the artist and his work into the *Task*.¹⁶ Mr. Bacon's reply is one of the few letters to Cowper which have escaped destruction.

After thanking him for the present, he says,¹⁷ "I should not have room in my paper for observations on the different places that struck me; this might serve for an excuse, as well as another equally true, that indeed I feared I might sink in your opinion, with respect to my taste. There is a disadvantage attending a reputation somewhat higher than

¹⁶ Bacon there
Gives more than female beauty to a stone,
And Chatham's eloquence to marble lips. — Book I.

¹⁷ July 18, 1785.

one's deserts, that it puts one upon the stretch, and sometimes upon shifts to support it. But indeed it is nothing more than the truth when I say that I am heartily glad your book was written, not only on my own account, but because I trust the best interests of mankind will be promoted by it. There are many that will not read a professedly religious book: the name of a clergyman to a treatise makes them cry out 'priestcraft,' and shut the book immediately. The peculiar phraseology of Christians excites in such persons the idea of Methodism, which includes in it those of enthusiasm and nonsense; so that a bar is raised at the very threshold, which usually prevents their entrance entirely. A writer on whom God has bestowed superior talents, commands their respect and attention; he will meet them on their own ground; he touches the springs of human nature, and sets them about what they so seldom do, — a thinking. This is a great point gained, for we are lost for want of consideration; and while they are detained by the liveliness and strength of the imagery, the beauty of the language and melody of the verse,¹⁸ who knows but the sentiment may enter into the soul? We pretend not to change the heart, but He who can, has made the use of probable means our duty; and having this single eye, we can never entirely miss our aim. 'If the son of peace be there, our peace shall rest upon them; otherwise it shall return to us again.'

"My dear sir, it is in vain my saying I have often wished to see you in London; if we can believe a poet, you are too much attached to sylvan scenes to venture into the suffocating air I am forced to breathe. In truth, I was obliged to remember it was the language of poetry, for I had in imagination packed up my alls, and reared my cottage in the midst of some fertile valley, on the border of some scarce-penetrable wood. I dreamed that there the weary might be at rest; but awaking, I recollected that I should

¹⁸ Perhaps Mr. Bacon remembered the first stanza in Herbert's Church Porch:

Thou whose sweet youth and early hopes enhance
Thy rate and price, and mark thee for a treasure;
Hearken unto a verser, who may chance
Rhyme thee to good, and make a bait of pleasure,
A verse may find him who a sermon flies,
And turn delight into a sacrifice,

carry that of which sometimes I think I am most weary, along with me. Alas! it is only in the grave that this wicked heart will cease from troubling!

"Well, I humbly hope that you and I are both placed by the Divine Hand, not only as we shall answer his great design, (for that all creatures must do,) but as our present situations shall best advance our final felicity. Our present happiness depends upon such an extensive concurrence of circumstances, as makes it absolutely beyond the calculation of mortals; but when we consider ourselves as in a state of discipline for another mode of existence, the question is involved in twofold darkness.

"I have rambled so much as to have left myself scarce room to thank you for the kind partiality with which you have mentioned my name in your book. What you said, I was very near believing, for I wished it true; and I could almost forgive myself for being pleased with it. If I am censured, I will throw it upon the verse: perhaps I should blush to have as much said of me in prose. Indeed it was so well said, it is most likely to be fiction, which, according to Waller, the Muses most delight in.

"You will easily perceive I have wrote what comes uppermost. I confide in your candor, and to the feelings of my heart, which cannot have dictated any thing incompatible with that sincere respect and esteem with which I am, dear sir,

Your obliged and obedient servant,

J. BACON."

In this letter ¹⁹ Mr. Bacon touched upon one of those causes to which the immediate popularity that the publication of the *Task* obtained for its author may be ascribed. The most impassioned and imaginative of our devotional writers has pronounced a severe but well-founded condemnation upon the generality of our books of devotion, saying, that they are, in a large degree, the occasion of that great indevotion which prevails among nominal Christians. They administer as physic that which never can be willingly taken

¹⁹ This letter is one of the valuable communications for which the Editor and the public are obliged to Mr. Upcott.

nor well assimilated unless it be received as food. But never were intellectual delight, and moral instruction, and religious feeling, more happily blended than in this poem: never was any purpose more effectually accomplished than that which Cowper proposed to himself in composing it; and the hope which Mr. Bacon expressed was speedily fulfilled.

Undoubtedly John Gilpin led the way to this popularity. Those who remember the effect of Henderson's recitation have attested this; and if Johnson had persisted in his first intention of excluding that ballad from the volume, because it had already been printed in so many forms, and dispersed every where through town and country, he would have committed a greater mistake than when he suppressed Mr. Newton's preface. Upon second thoughts, he not only admitted it, but specified it in the title-page and in the advertisement. Cowper was fully sensible of the service it had rendered him. He says to Mr. Newton, "I know no more than you what kind of a market my book has found; but this I believe, that had not Henderson died, and had it been worth my while to have given him a hundred pounds to have read it in public, it would have been more popular than it is." ²⁰

The first volume had sold so slowly that it was not thought prudent to publish the Task and its appendants as a second; but the first, with a complete list of its contents, was advertised at the end of the book; and of the many who were induced to read the Task because it was written by the author of John Gilpin, not a few were led to inquire for the previous volume because it was by the author of the Task. In the second edition, which was called for in the ensuing year, the two volumes were connected as first and second, and in the numerous editions that have succeeded each other, they have never been disunited.

Before Cowper could know how the public received his Task, he had the satisfaction of finding that it had passed the more formidable ordeal of his neighbors, and that he was "allowed to be a genius at Olney." "Mr. Teedon," says he, writing to Mr. Unwin, "has just left us. He has read my book, and, as if fearful that I had overlooked some

²⁰ Dec. 10, 1785.

of them myself, has pointed out to me all its beauties. I do assure you the man has a very acute discernment, and a taste that I have no fault to find with. I hope that you are of the same opinion.”²¹ Mr. Bacon’s letters, and one from Mr. Barham, he mentioned as being very flattering; “such,” said he, “as might make a lean poet plump, and an humble poet proud; but being myself neither lean nor humble, I know of no other effect they had than that they pleased me; and I communicate the intelligence to you not without an assured hope that you will be pleased also.” Thanking the same friend a little while afterwards for some facetious engravings of John Gilpin, he says, “A serious poem is like a swan; it flies heavily, and never far; but a jest has the wings of a swallow, that never tire, and that carry it into every nook and corner. I am perfectly a stranger, however, to the reception that my volume meets with, and I believe in respect of my *non-chalance* upon that subject, if authors could but copy so fair an example, am a most exemplary character. I must tell you, nevertheless, that although the laurels that I gain at Olney will never minister much to my pride, I have acquired some. The Reverend Mr. Scott is my admirer, and thinks my second volume superior to my first. It ought to be so. If we do not improve by practice, then nothing can mend us; and a man has no more cause to be mortified at being told that he has excelled himself, than the elephant had, whose praise it was that he was the greatest elephant in the world, himself excepted.”²² Public opinion, however, was pronounced upon this volume so speedily, that it became popular before the reviews gave their concurrent sentence in its favor. And, before Cowper was apprized of its reception, it had the happy effect of renewing his correspondence with his relations. It has been said that they neglected him for many years till the Task came out, and that they were then glad to take him up again. Glad to resume the intercourse undoubtedly they were, and proud also, as well they might be. But the neglect had not been exclusively on their side; — it was

²¹ July 27, 1785.²² Aug. 27, 1785.

reciprocal, easily accountable on both sides; and when accounted for, it is easily to be excused.

In a letter to Mr. Unwin, written at this time,²³ Cowper says, "I have had more comfort, far more comfort, in the connections that I have formed within the last twenty years, than in the more numerous ones that I had before. Memorandum, the latter are almost all Unwins, or Unwinisms."

In this same letter it was that he said he was "covetous, if ever man was, of living in the remembrance of absentees whom he highly valued and esteemed." It has been seen that he endeavored, and without success, to recall himself to Thurlow's remembrance and to Colman's; but it does not appear that he made any similar advances towards his relations, dearly as he loved his uncle Ashley, highly as he respected his cousin the general, and much as he was beholden to both. On either part there seems to have existed an uncomfortable feeling. Cowper, though his annual allowance from them had been regularly received, believed²⁴ at this time that the general had withdrawn his part of it; and he remembered that the last letters from his uncle were in a tone of gentle reproof and prudential admonishment to which he had not thought proper to defer. He supposed that they could regard him only as an unfortunate kinsman, who, having disappointed the fair hopes and expectations of his family, had become a burden upon them—an object of their compassion, but no longer of their love. They, no doubt, on their part, inferred from the strain of his latest communications, and from his conduct, that his malady had only assumed a milder form, and that one effect of it had been to alienate him from all those whom he looked upon as unregenerate. That he did not send them his first volume must have strengthened them in this opinion; and if they looked into it (as they were likely to do) under an impression of this kind, they would perceive there much that tended to confirm it, and might therefore disregard other parts in which his original and happy character appeared through the cloud. That character manifested itself

²³ Aug. 27, 1785.

²⁴ See p. 134.

fully in his second publication; and it was not because Cowper was becoming famous, but because he seemed to have become himself again, that the intercourse between him and his relations was now reopened by the dearest of them, Lady Hesketh.

They who remembered Lady Hesketh in her prime, spoke of her as "a brilliant beauty, who attracted all eyes on her at Ranelagh."²⁵ No portrait of her has, as yet, been discovered; and it is even more to be regretted that her correspondence with her sister, which might have thrown much light upon some of the most interesting parts of Cowper's history, has not been preserved, and that her letters to Cowper himself have shared the same fate. I cannot but repeat here that, though there is often cause to censure the want of discretion and of delicacy with which posthumous papers have been published, there is more reason to condemn the rashness, or the carelessness and the folly, with which they have been destroyed. They whose researches have been among such documents know how imperfect the information is that can be gathered from a one-sided correspondence. Even with regard to individual character, it sometimes happens that more may be learnt from the way in which those who are well acquainted with an eminent person wrote to him, than from any thing which transpires in his own letters.

In the best sense of the words, however, no woman can be better known than Lady Hesketh. She had looked upon her cousin almost as a brother, in childhood and in youth, and many years of absence and intermitted intercourse had in no degree diminished her regard for him. On both sides the latent feeling needed only a touch to call it forth. She had now been seven years a widow; and during the first years of her widowhood, after her return to England, she had been much engaged "with a variety of mournful duties." The last letter²⁶ that she had received from him was in a strain of that melancholy pietism which casts a gloom over every thing, and which seems at once to chill the intellect and wither the affections. But now

²⁵ Letter from Sir Egerton Brydges.

²⁶ See p. 140.

she saw that he could once more indulge a playful temper, and sport upon light subjects as he had been wont to do in former days; and after reading John Gilpin, her heart told her that a letter from the cousin with whom he used "to giggle and make giggle" would be received and answered with as much warmth and sincerity as it was written with.

How perfectly this expectation was answered, will be seen in his reply.

TO LADY HESKETH.

MY DEAR COUSIN,

Oct. 12, 1785.

It is no new thing with you to give pleasure; but I will venture to say, that you do not often give more than you gave me this morning. When I came down to breakfast, and found upon the table a letter franked by my uncle, and when opening that frank I found that it contained a letter from you, I said within myself—"This is just as it should be. We are all grown young again, and the days that I thought I should see no more are actually returned." You perceive, therefore, that you judged well when you conjectured, that a line from you would not be disagreeable to me. It could not be otherwise than, as in fact it proved, a most agreeable surprise, for I can truly boast of an affection for you, that neither years, nor interrupted intercourse, have at all abated. I need only recollect how much I valued you once, and with how much cause, immediately to feel a revival of the same value; if that can be said to revive, which at the most has only been dormant for want of employment; but I slander it when I say that it has slept. A thousand times have I recollected a thousand scenes, in which our two selves have formed the whole of the drama, with the greatest pleasure; at times, too, when I had no reason to suppose that I should ever hear from you again. I have laughed with you at the Arabian Nights Entertainment, which afforded us, as you well know, a fund of merriment that deserves never to be forgot. I have walked with you to Netley Abbey, and have scrambled with you over hedges in every direction, and many other feats we have performed together, upon the field of my remembrance, and all within these few years. Should I say within this twelvemonth, I

should not transgress the truth. The hours that I have spent with you were among the pleasantest of my former days, and are therefore chronicled in my mind so deeply, as to feel no erasure. Neither do I forget my poor friend, Sir Thomas. I should remember him, indeed, at any rate, on account of his personal kindness to myself; but the last testimony that he gave of his regard for you endears him to me still more. With his uncommon understanding (for with many peculiarities he had more sense than any of his acquaintance,) and with his generous sensibilities, it was hardly possible that he should not distinguish you as he has done. As it was the last, so it was the best proof, that he could give, of a judgment that never deceived him, when he would allow himself leisure to consult it.

You say that you have often heard of me: that puzzles me. I cannot imagine from what quarter, but it is no matter. I must tell you, however, my cousin, that your information has been a little defective. That I am happy in my situation is true; I live, and have lived these twenty years, with Mrs. Unwin, to whose affectionate care of me, during the far greater part of that time, it is, under Providence, owing that I live at all. But I do not account myself happy in having been for thirteen of those years in a state of mind that has made all that care and attention necessary — an attention, and a care, that have injured her health, and which, had she not been uncommonly supported, must have brought her to the grave. But I will pass to another subject; it would be cruel to particularize only to give pain, neither would I by any means give a sable hue to the first letter of a correspondence so unexpectedly renewed.

I am delighted with what you tell me of my uncle's good health. To enjoy any measure of cheerfulness at so late a day is much; but to have that late day enlivened with the vivacity of youth, is much more, and in these postdiluvian times a rarity indeed. Happy, for the most part, are parents who have daughters. Daughters are not apt to outlive their natural affections, which a son has generally survived, even before his boyish years are expired. I rejoice particularly in my uncle's felicity, who has three female descendants

from his little person, who leave him nothing to wish for upon that head.

My dear cousin, dejection of spirits, which, I suppose, may have prevented many a man from becoming an author, made me one. I find constant employment necessary, and therefore take care to be constantly employed. Manual occupations do not engage the mind sufficiently, as I know by experience, having tried many. But composition, especially of verse, absorbs it wholly. I write, therefore, generally three hours in a morning, and in an evening I transcribe. I read also, but less than I write, for I must have bodily exercise, and therefore never pass a day without it.

You ask me where I have been this summer. I answer, at Olney. Should you ask me where I spent the last seventeen summers, I should still answer, at Olney. Ay, and the winters also; I have seldom left it, and except when I attended my brother in his last illness, never, I believe, a fortnight together.

Adieu, my beloved cousin; I shall not always be thus nimble in reply, but shall always have great pleasure in answering you when I can.

Yours, my dear friend and cousin,

W. C.

In her second letter, Lady Hesketh inquired into the state of his income, apprehending that it must needs be a straitened one, and offering him such assistance as she was able to afford. He replied thus:—

TO LADY HESKETH.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,

Olney, Nov. 9, 1785.

Whose last most affectionate letter has run in my head ever since I received it, and which I now sit down to answer two days sooner than the post will serve me; I thank you for it, and with a warmth for which I am sure you will give me credit, though I do not spend many words in describing it. I do not seek *new* friends, not being altogether sure that I should find them, but have unspeakable pleasure in being still beloved by an old one. I hope that now our correspondence has suffered its last interruption, and

that we shall go down together to the grave, chatting and chirping as merrily as such a scene of things as this will permit.

I am happy that my poems have pleased you. My volume has afforded me no such pleasure at any time, either while I was writing it, or since its publication, as I have derived from yours and my uncle's opinion of it. I make certain allowances for partiality, and for that peculiar quickness of taste; with which you both relish what you like, and after all drawbacks upon those accounts duly made, find myself rich in the measure of your approbation that still remains. But above all, I honor John Gilpin, since it was he who first encouraged you to write. I made him on purpose to laugh at, and he served his purpose well; but I am now in debt to him for a more valuable acquisition than all the laughter in the world amounts to — the recovery of my intercourse with you, which is to me inestimable. My benevolent and generous cousin, when I was once asked if I wanted any thing, and given delicately to understand that the inquirer was ready to supply all my occasions, I thankfully and civilly, but positively, declined the favor. I neither suffer, nor have suffered, any such inconveniences as I had not much rather endure than come under obligations of that sort to a person comparatively with yourself a stranger to me. But to you I answer otherwise. I know you thoroughly, and the liberality of your disposition, and have that consummate confidence in the sincerity of your wish to serve me, that delivers me from all awkward constraint, and from all fear of trespassing by acceptance. To you, therefore, I reply, yes. Whenever, and whatsoever, and in what manner-soever you please; and add, moreover, that my affection for the giver is such as will increase to me tenfold the satisfaction that I shall have in receiving. It is necessary, however, that I should let you a little into the state of my finances, that you may not suppose them more narrowly circumscribed than they are. Since Mrs. Unwin and I have lived at Olney, we have had but one purse, although during the whole of that time, till lately, her income was nearly double mine. Her revenues indeed are now in some measure reduced,

and do not much exceed my own ; the worst consequence of this is, that we are forced to deny ourselves some things which hitherto we have been better able to afford, but they are such things as neither life, nor the well-being of life, depend upon. My own income has been better than it is ; but when it was best, it would not have enabled me to live as my connections demanded that I should, had it not been combined with a better than itself, at least at this end of the kingdom. Of this I had full proof during three months that I spent in lodgings at Huntingdon, in which time, by the help of good management, and a clear notion of economical matters, I contrived to spend the income of a twelvemonth. Now, my beloved cousin, you are in possession of the whole case as it stands. Strain no points to your own inconvenience or hurt, for there is no need of it, but indulge yourself in communicating (no matter what) that you can spare without missing it, since by so doing you will be sure to add to the comforts of my life one of the sweetest that I can enjoy—a token and proof of your affection.

I cannot believe but that I should know you, notwithstanding all that time may have done : there is not a feature of your face, could I meet it upon the road, by itself, that I should not instantly recollect. I should say, that is my cousin's nose, or those are her lips and her chin, and no woman upon earth can claim them but herself. As for me, I am a very smart youth of my years ; I am not indeed grown gray so much as I am grown bald. No matter : there was more hair in the world than ever had the honor to belong to me ; accordingly, having found just enough to curl a little at my ears, and to intermix with a little of my own, that still hangs behind, I appear, if you see me in an afternoon, to have a very decent head-dress, not easily distinguished from my natural growth, which being worn with a small bag, and a black riband about my neck, continues to me the charms of my youth, even on the verge of age. Away with the fear of writing too often !

W. C.

P. S. — That the view I give you of myself may be

complete, I add the two following items — That I am in debt to nobody, and that I grow fat.

The happiest stage of Cowper's life commenced when the intercourse with this beloved cousin was thus renewed. He compared himself, in the effect produced upon him, to the traveller described in Pope's *Messiah*,²⁴ who, as he passes through a sandy desert, starts at the sudden and unexpected sound of a waterfall. And the same volume which was the occasion of restoring to him this blessing, at once placed him at the head of the poets of his age.

²⁴ The swain in barren deserts, with surprise,
Sees lilies spring, and sudden verdure rise,
And starts amidst the thirsty wilds to hear
New falls of water murmuring in his ear.

ADDITIONAL NOTES

AND

ILLUSTRATIONS.

Hooker's Epitaph, by Sir William Cowper, p. 2. — It is thus printed by Izaak Walton : —

Though nothing can be spoke worthy his fame,
Or the remembrance of that precious name,
Judicious Hooker; though this cost be spent
On him that hath a lasting monument
In his own books; yet ought we to express,
If not his worth, yet our respectfulness.
Church-ceremonies he maintained; then why
Without all ceremony should he die?¹
Was it because his life and death should be
Both equal patterns of humility?
Or that perhaps this only glorious one
Was, above all, to ask, Why had he none?
Yet he that lay so long obscurely low,
Doth now preferred to greater honors go.
Ambitious men, learn hence to be more wise;
Humility is the true way to rise;
And God in me this lesson did inspire,
To bid this humble man, "Friend, sit up higher!"

Westminster, p. 12. — Cowper even liked the school well enough to admire the worst things belonging to it — its grammars. "I am no friend," he says, "to Lilly's Grammar, though I was indebted to him for my first introduction to the Latin language. The grammars used at Westminster, both for the Latin and the Greek, are those to which, if I had a young man to educate, I should give the preference. They have the merit of being compendious and perspicuous, in both which properties I judge Lilly to be defective. They are called Busby's Grammars, though Busby did not compose them. The compilation was a task imposed upon his uppermost boys, the plan only being drawn by the master, and the versification, which I have often admired for the ingenuity of it, being theirs. I never knew a boy of any abilities, who had taken his notion of language from these grammars, that was not accurate to a degree that distinguished him from most others." — *Letter to Mr. Unwin, July 3, 1784.*

I do not think any Westminster man would agree with Cowper in his opinion of the aforesaid grammars. As for their being compendious and perspicuous, I should not be more surprised at hearing them called entertaining.

¹ Qu. *lie?*

Benefit derived both from the discipline of Westminster and its indiscipline, p. 13.—“One constant blunder of these New Broomers,” says Mr. Coleridge, “these Penny Magazine sages and philanthropists, in reference to our public schools, is to confine their views to what schoolmasters teach the boys, with entire oversight of all that the boys are excited to learn from each other, and of themselves, with more geniality even *because* it is *not* a part of their compelled school knowledge. An Eton boy’s knowledge of the St. Lawrence, Mississippi, Missouri, Orellana, &c. will be generally found in exact proportion to his knowledge of the Iliad, Hebrus, Orontes, &c.; inasmuch as modern travels and voyages are more entertaining and fascinating than Cellarius; or Robinson Crusoe, Dampier, and Captain Cook, than the Periegesis. Compare the *lads* themselves from Eton and Harrow, &c. with the *alumni* of the New Broom Institution, and not the lists of school lessons; and be that comparison the criterion.”—*Table Talk*, ii. 224.

In 1756 he lost his father, p. 22.—“Biographers,” says Dr. Memes, “have stated, that Cowper was but little affected by his father’s death. Certainly nothing to the contrary appears in the poet’s writings; but the cause assigned, namely, a depression of spirits, which is said to have hindered him from duly estimating the magnitude of the blow, did not at this time exist. The first attack had passed away, and the second and more dreadful one had its commencement many years afterwards. Granting, then, the fact, we must seek some other explanation. Though there is no reason to doubt the filial reverence and respect with which Cowper regarded his surviving parent, yet the prolonged interruption of that personal intercourse which to the sentiment of duty adds the intensity of love and attachment, had never allowed these feelings fully to unfold themselves. We have already seen that the poet draws from his own experience the picture of a youthful heart chilled and seared by early separation from home and its associations. Hardly can any subsequent opportunity make up for the vividness of first impressions on the opening affections of childhood; or for the loss of that season when the child so guilelessly, so insensibly, yet so sweetly and certainly, gains the proper station in the parental bosom. But that Cowper’s disposition naturally overflowed with this genuine kindness, needs no other proof than the affectionate sincerity with which, at the very time of which we now speak, he regarded another relative. ‘How well,’ says he, writing on this subject long afterwards, ‘do I still remember, when I have been kept awake the whole night by the thought that my uncle might die before me!’ Who does not recognize in these words the pure aspirations of his own young heart? and what clearer evidence can there be of the baneful effects of early dissipation and religious indifference, than their stifling in such a breast the yearnings of filial affection? For, conceding to absence and interruption of cordial intercourse all their effect in estranging relatives from each other, an absorbing and selfish dissipation—and dissipation is always selfish—could alone so speedily obliterate from a son’s recollection the memory of a father.”

I should be wanting in one of the first duties of a biographer if I did not express my indignation at the manner in which Cowper is treated in this passage. A double charge is here brought against him, that he felt little upon his father’s death, and that this want of feeling

was the effect of religious indifference, and of early, absorbing, selfish dissipation.

The proof of the first charge is, that "nothing to the contrary" appears in the poet's writings.* Now any one who thinks upon the matter for a moment may perceive that many of Cowper's letters have perished, many have not been published, and of those which have appeared in print, much has been suppressed. Let it be observed, also, that we have none of his letters written at, or near, the time of his father's decease. What then can be more unjust, or more uncharitable, than to accuse him of want of filial feeling on such an occasion, because no expression of it happened to be found in letters written many years afterwards?

This would be bad enough, if this were all; but it is even worse to account for the imputed want of feeling by early, absorbing, selfish dissipation, and this Dr. Memes supposes to be proved by Cowper's own confession! Into what error and injustice must men be led, if they take in a literal sense the exaggerated language of enthusiastic self-condemnation, even when (as in Cowper's case) it is undoubtedly sincere! What Cowper's dissipation amounted to has been shown in the text.

Original of the Letter to Clotworthy Rowley, Esq. p. 26.

Delicia et Lepores mei!

Lond. Aug. 1758.

Qui Gallicè scripsisti, responsum habes Latinum; non quia Linguam hanc satis calleo, sed istam quia nimis ignoro. Litteras Anglicanas te contempturum certò scivi. Dum tu Rhadamanthum tuum, quicumque is est, per villas atque oppida sectaris, majori, ut ais, opere quam lucro; ego, neque laborans, neque lucrum sperans, otiosam, ideoque mihi jucundissimam vitam ago; neque rus tibi invideo, lutilentum scilicet, et in-tempestivo diluvio quotidie obrutum. Aliquando autem et ego in suburbana rura, amicum vel amicam visurus, proficiscor: breve est iter, quod vel pedes, vel currù conducto facile perficias; perrare enim, et nunquam nisi coactus, in caballum ascendo, quippe qui nates teneras hubeo, quas exiguus usus contundit et dilacerat. Triduum nuper, Villæ quam dicunt Greenwich, commoratus sum. O beatum Triduum, quod si Triennium fuisset, immortalitatem Superis minime invidissem. Puellulam ibi amabilem et amatam, de quâ sæpius tibi locutus sum, inveni. Eâ Virgo est ætate (annos nata sedecim) ut dies singuli novum aliquod decus ad formam offerant. Modestâ, et (quod mirum videtur in Fæminâ) taciturnitate est maximâ; quando autem loquitur, crederes Musam loqui. Hei mihi, quod Sidus tam clarum aliò spectet! Indiâ Occidentali oriundum, illuc rediturum est; mihiq; nihil præter suspiria et lacrymas relicturum. Tu me amore sentes torqueri, — ego te lasciviâ. —

Paucis abhinc diebus ad Hortos Bonæ Mariæ sum profectus; delicias ejus loci nequeo satis laudare. Ludi Scenici qui ibi exhibentur, more Italorum, nostrâ vero linguâ, sunt constituti. Partes quas Recitativas

* To refute such an argument by facts, would be treating it with too much respect. It is best refuted by exposing its utter emptiness. But the reader may call to mind a singularly beautiful passage, (p. 22,) in which Cowper, more than thirty years after his father's death, speaks of his feelings upon going for the last time to the parsonage at Berkhamstead. If he had not loved his father dearly, and found that home a happy home whenever he went to it, he would not have "preferred it to a palace."

vocant, ridiculae sunt ultra modum; cantilenae autem suavissimae. Unum hoc timendum, ne sub Dio sedentem, tussis occupet vel febris.

Quod ad amicum nostrum Alston attinet, neque Epistolam mihi misit quamlibet, neque missurum reor; scio enim jamdudum ignavam hominis naturam, et obliuioam. Si videris, objurgationes aliquos a me in eum confer, Culumque meum osculetur, jube.

Vale.

Nonsense Club, p. 27. — Dr. Memes says that Mr. De Grey, afterwards a judge, was one of this club. (p. 59.) He may be right, but as, in his list of the members, he omits Bensley, and includes Thurlow, his authority cannot be relied on.

Coleman at Westminster, p. 34. — An epistle of his to Lord Viscount Pulteney, written from school in 1747, is printed in the *St. James's Magazine*, vol. ii. p. 240. In this poor Coley,

Who still is drudging in the college
In slow pursuit of further knowledge,

complains, in untranscribable rhyme, that many a cruel lash was laid on him,

To make him sometime hence a parson;
A judge, perhaps, or a physician,
Strolling on Ratcliff's exhibition.

After describing the manner in which he supposes his friend to pass his time on the continent, visiting the camp there, and the foreign courts, he concludes thus: —

Though I have long with study mental
Labored at language Oriental,
Yet in my soil the Hebrew root
Has scarcely made one single shoot.

I've now broke up, but have a task though,
Harder than yours with Mr. Mascoo;
For mine's as knotty as the Devil.
Your law and master both are civil,
With milder means to learning lead;
By different roads with different speed;
Douglas and you keep gently jogging,
But I must run the race with flogging.

Cowper's papers in the Connoisseur, p. 36. — Five papers are certainly his — Nos. 111, 115, 119, 134, and 138. Whether the letters by Mr. Town's cousin Village, in other numbers, (13, 23, 41, 76, 81, 105, and 139,) are also his, is uncertain, — most probably not, for they are not assigned to the same author as the five former, in the concluding paper.

Gray's Bard, p. 37. — This ode was first published in 1757, with that on the Progress of Poetry. The *Monthly Review* treated the author respectfully, but informed him that he was not taking the way to be popular. "As this publication," says the critic, "seems designed for those who have formed their taste by the models of antiquity, the generality of readers cannot be supposed adequate judges of its merit; nor will the poet, it is presumed, be greatly disappointed if he finds them backward in commending a performance not entirely suited to their apprehensions. We cannot, however, without some regret, be-

hold those talents so capable of giving pleasure to all, exerted on efforts that, at best, can amuse only the few; we cannot behold this rising poet seeking fame among the learned, without hinting to him the same advice that Isocrates used to give his scholars — *Study the people.*" Vol. xvii. p. 239.

The two burlesque odes were reviewed in the same journal at great length, and with due praise, for they are excellent of their kind, — but on the kind itself, there are these just remarks: — "This way of reciting and wresting the verses of truly respectable writers, is at best but a kind of literary mimicry; the success of which considerably depends on the copy's being exaggerated beyond the original, by an injurious resemblance, sometimes termed *outré* by the French; while it attempts to interest us also, from that excess of self-love, which too generally disposes a man to depreciate the excellence of another in any art or faculty, to which he forms pretensions himself. Nevertheless, not to urge these suggestions beyond what the present occasion will strictly bear, we do not suppose our ingenious bard was actuated by sheer acrimony, or an *arugo mera*, as Horace strongly expresses it, against his eminent poetical brethren here; but we rather conjecture, that an ardent, sprightly imagination, joined to some consciousness of his own faculties and attainments, has excited him to the present *lusus ingenii, cum tantillo invidia*. In this view it will appear tolerably venial, if we consider how far juvenile emulation may operate, and recollect, as some writer pleasantly expresses it, that 'wits are game cocks to one another.'

"We are conscious of having allowed more room to this article, than we generally do to those on such short performances; and chiefly, because the contention of rival wits and poets has often something so entertaining, as to engage the attention of the literary, the poetical, and elegant, who, we suppose, constitute a great proportion of our readers. But we shall conclude with hinting to our mettlesome ode-writer, upon the whole, that the most pardonable, the most creditable way of lowering his over-towering brethren, is to excel them. And whenever he has attained this glorious, because difficult, supereminence, let him watch his own demeanor so assiduously, as to give no occasion to the *genus irritabile*, the poetical hornets, to object that very pride and superciliousness to him, which he has ridiculed, and, we hope, intended to reform, in others." — Vol. xxiii. pp. 57—63. July, 1760.

Footes personalities, p. 51. — The last editor of Churchill's poems (in 1804) has offered a most insufficient apology for this part of Foote's conduct. "His exposing living characters on the stage," says this gentleman, "has been much censured; but we cannot help thinking, that authors of this kind are in some respects more useful to the age in which they live, than those who only range abroad into the various scenes of life for general character" — as if this were any excuse for holding up the harmless weaknesses or peculiarities of a private individual to public ridicule!

Excesses which Churchill braved in the strength of a robust frame, p. 68.

"For me let Galen moulder on the shelf;
I'll live, and be physician to myself.
Whilst soul is joined to body, whether fate
Allot a longer or a shorter date,

I'll make them live as brother should with brother,
And keep them in good humor with each other.

"The surest road to health, say what they will,
Is— never to suppose we shall be ill.
Most of those evils we poor mortals know,
From doctors and imagination flow.
Hence to old women with your boasted rules,
Stale traps, and only sacred now to fools!
As well may sons of physic hope to find
One medicine, as one hour for all mankind.

"If Rupert after ten is out of bed;
The fool, next morning, can't hold up his head.
What reason this which me to bed must call,
Whose head, thank Heaven! never aches at all?
In different courses different tempers run;
He hates the moon; I sicken at the sun.
Wound up at twelve at noon, his clock goes right;
Mine better goes wound up at twelve at night."
Night, v. 69—84.

Lloyd alludes to this passage in some lines which seem to imply that he could not follow his friend's course with impunity.

"Wits——

——live a life of imitation,
Are slovens, revellers, and brutes,
Laborious, absent, prattlers, mutes,
From some example handed down
Of some great genius of renown.

"If Addison, from habit's trick,
Could bite his fingers to the quick,
Shall not I nibble from design,
And be an Addison to mine?
If Pope most feelingly complains
Of aching head, and throbbing pains,
My head and arm his posture hit,
And I already ache for wit.
If Churchill, following Nature's call,
Has 'head that never aches at all;
With burning brow and heavy eye,
I'll give my looks and pain the lie."

*Epistle to a Friend who sent the Author a Hamper of Wine.
St. James's Mag. Oct. 1763.*

Poor Lloyd, by his own confession, played the rake with a heavy heart.

No man knew better than Churchill that the art of poetry requires no ordinary pains, p. 69.

How much mistaken are the men who think
That all who will without restraint may drink;
May largely drink, e'en till their bowels burst,
Pleading no right but merely that of thirst,
At the pure waters of the living well,
Beside whose streams the Muses love to dwell!
Verse is with them a knack, an idle toy,
A rattle gilded o'er, on which a boy
May play untaught, whilst, without art or force,
Make it but jingle, music comes of course.

Little do such men know the toil, the pains,
The daily, nightly racking of the brains,
To range the thoughts, the matter to digest,
To cull fit phrases, and reject the rest;

To know the times when humor on the cheek
 Of mirth may hold her sports ; when wit should speak,
 And when be silent ; when to use the powers
 Of ornament ; and how to place the flowers,
 So that they neither give a tawdry glare,
 " Nor waste their sweetness in the desert air ;"
 To form, (which few can do, — and scarcely one,
 One critic in an age, can find when done,)
 To form a plan, to strike a grand outline,
 To fill it up, and make the picture shine
 A full and perfect piece ; to make coy rhyme
 Renounce her follies, and with sense keep time ;
 To make proud sense against her nature bend,
 And wear the chains of rhyme, yet call her friend.

Gotham, b. II. v. 1—22.

The St. James's Magazine, p. 70.—Lloyd's declaration of what *h Magazine* was not to contain, shows what were the usual attractions of such publications at that time.

No pictures taken from the life,
 Where all proportions are at strife ;
 No humming-bird, no painted flower,
 No beast just landed at the Tower ;
 No wooden notes, no colored map,
 No country-dance shall stop a gap.
 O Philomath, be not severe
 If not one problem meets you here,
 Where gossip A and neighbor B
 Pair, like good friends, with C and D,
 And E F G, H I J join,
 And curve and incidental line
 Fall out, fall in, and cross each other,
 Just like a sister and a brother.
 Ye tiny poets, tiny wits,
 Who frisk about on tiny tits,
 Who words disjoin, and sweetly sing,
 Take one third part, and take the thing,
 Then close the joints again to frame
 Some lady's or some city's name ;
 Enjoy your own, your proper Phœbus ;
 We neither make nor print a rebus.
 No crambo, no acrostic fine,
 Great letters lacing down each line ;
 No strange conundrum, no invention
 Beyond the reach of comprehension ;
 No riddle which, whoe'er unties,
 Claims twelve *MUSEUMS* for the prize, —
 Shall strive to please you at the expense
 Of simple taste and common sense.

Charles Denis, p. 71.—The *Monthly Review*, (April, 1754,) noticing *Denis's Select Fables in Verse*, says, " In regard to his versification, it is not unaptly characterized by what Mr Congreve observed of the *Pindariques* of his time ; as being ' a bundle of rambling, incoherent thoughts, expressed in a like parcel of irregular stanzas, which also consist of such another complication of disproportioned, uncertain, and perplexed verses and rhymes.' "

Congreve's just description could not have been more unaptly applied. The reviewers have entirely overlooked the subject matter of the poems, and the key in which the metre was pitched.

Lloyd thus characterizes *Denis* more fairly, though too favorably : —

Originals will always please ;
 And copies too, if done with ease.

Would not old Plautus wish to bear,
 Turned English host, an English air,
 If Thornton, rich in native wit,
 Would make the modes and diction fit?
 Or, — as I know you hate to roam, —
 To fetch an instance nearer home, —
 Though in an idiom most unlike,
 A similarity must strike,
 Where both, of simple nature fond,
 In art and genius correspond;
 And *waice* both (allow the phrase,
 Which no one English word conveys)
 Wrap up their stories neat and clean;
 Easy as —

FRIEND.

Denis's you mean.

The very man, — not mere translation,
 But La Fontaine by transmigration.

AUTHOR.

Authors, as Dryden's maxim runs,
 Have what he calls poetic sons.
 Thus Milton, more correctly wild,
 Was richer Spenser's lawful child;
 And Churchill, got on all the Nine,
 Is Dryden's heir in every line.
 Thus Denis proves his parents plain,
 The child of Ease and La Fontaine.

St. James's Mag. vol. i. p. 380.

A Poem in the St. James's Magazine, probably by Cowper, p. 71. —

AN ODE.

SECUNDUM ARTEM.

1.

Shall I begin with *Ah*, or *Oh*?
 Be sad? *Oh*! yes. Be glad? *Ah*! no.
 Light subjects suit not grave Pindaric ode,
 Which walks in metre down the Strophic road.
 But let the sober matron wear
 Her own mechanic, sober air:
Ah me! ill suits, *alas!* the sprightly jig,
 Long robes of ermine, or Sir Cloudsley's wig.
 Come, placid Dulness, gently come,
 And all my faculties benumb;
 Let thought turn exile, while the vacant mind
 To trickie words and pretty phrase confined,
 Pumping for trim description's art,
 To win the ear, neglects the heart.
 So shall thy sister Taste's peculiar sons,
 Lined descendants from the Goths and Huns,
 Struck with the true and grand sublime
 Of *rythm* converted into *rime*,
 Court the quaint muse, and con her lessons o'er,
 Where sleep the sluggish waves by Granta's shore:
 There shall each poet pare and trim,
 Stretch, cramp, or lop the verse's limb,
 While rebel Wit beholds them with disdain,
 And Fancy flies aloft, nor heeds their servile chain.

2.

Oh, Fancy, bright aerial maid!
 Where have thy vagrant footsteps strayed?

For, *Al!* I miss thee 'midst thy wonted haunt,
 Since silent now th' enthusiastic chant,
 Which erst like frenzy rolled along,
 Driven by th' impetuous tide of song;
 Rushing secure where native genius bore,
 Not cautious coasting by the shelving shore.
 Hail to the sons of modern Rime,
 Mechanic dealers in sublime,
 Whose lady Muse full wantonly is dressed
 In light expressions quaint, and tinsel vest,
 Where swelling epithets are laid
 (Art's ineffectual parade)
 As varnish on the cheek of harlot light;
 The rest thin sown with profit or delight,
 But ill compares with ancient song,
 Where Genius poured its flood along:
 Yet such is Art's presumptuous, idle claim;
 She marshals out the way to modern fame;
 From Grecian fables' pompous lore
 Description's studied, glittering store,
 Smooth, soothing sounds, and sweet alternate rime,
 Clinking, like change of bells, in tangle chime.

3.

The lark shall soar in every Ode,
 With flowers of light description strowed;
 And sweetly, warbling Philomel, shall flow
 Thy soothing sadness in mechanic woe.
 Trim epithets shall spread their gloss,
 While every cell's o'ergrown with moss:
 Here oaks shall rise in chains of ivy bound,
 There smouldering stones o'erspread the rugged ground.
 Here forests brown, and azure hills,
 There babbling founts, and prattling rills;
 Here some gay river floats in crisped streams,
 While the bright sun now gilds his morning beams,
 Or, sinking to his Thetis' breast,
 Drives in description down the west.
 Oh let me boast, with pride-becoming skill,
 I crown the summit of Parnassus' hill:
 While Taste with Genius shall dispense,
 And sound shall triumph over sense;
 O'er the gay mead with curious steps I'll stray,
 And, like the bee, steal all its sweets away;
 Extract its beauty, and its power,
 From every new poetic flower,
 Whose sweets collected may a wreath compose,
 To bind the poet's brow, or please the critic's nose.

Lines to Lloyd, p. 74, n. 23. — The epistle from which these lines are extracted is signed R. Shepherd, — a learned, pious, and exemplary man, afterwards archdeacon of Bedford. Happy had it been for Lloyd if his most intimate associates had held the same sane and salutary opinions. A list of his works may be found in Nichols's *Literary Anecdotes*, vol. ii. 328. Among those works is "The Nuptials, a didactic poem, in three books," 1762, 4to.; and the following passage, remarkable enough in itself, in one of Lloyd's *Dialogues*, identifies the author of that poem with his correspondent. The Poet is replying to a Friend who advises him to produce

———— a work of length,
 Something which speaks poetic strength. —

AUTHOR.

The current studies of the day
 Can rarely reach beyond a Play:

A Pamphlet may deserve a look,
 But heaven defend us from a Book !
 A libel flies on scandal's wings,
 But works of length are heavy things ;
 Not one in twenty will succeed :
 Consider, sir, how few can read.

FRIEND.

I mean a work of *merit*.

AUTHOR.

True.

FRIEND.

A man of *taste* must buy.

AUTHOR.

Yes ; you
 And half a dozen more, my friend,
 Whom your good taste shall recommend.
 Experience will by facts prevail,
 When argument and reason fail ;
 The NUPTIALS NOW —

FRIEND.

Whose Nuptials, sir ?

AUTHOR.

A Poet's. Did that poem *stir* ?
 No, — first, though thousand readers pass,
 It still looks through its pane of glass,
 And seems indignant to exclaim,
 Pass on, ye Sons of Taste, for shame !

Vol. i. p. 374.

Lloyd in the Fleet, p. 76. — When Lloyd's fable of the Hare and Tortoise was originally published in the *Connoisseur*, (No. 90, Oct. 15, 1755,) one of the editors prefaced it with an introductory paper, part of which Thornton, Colman, and Lloyd himself, must at this time have looked back upon as prophetic.

" If we consider that part of our acquaintances whom we remember from their infancy, we shall find that the expectations we once entertained of their future abilities are in many instances disappointed. Those who were accounted heavy, dull boys have, by diligence and application, made their way to the first honors, and become eminent for their learning and knowledge of the world ; while others, who were regarded as bright lads, and imagined to possess parts equal to any scheme of life, have turned out dissolute and ignorant, and quite unworthy the title of a genius, except in the modern acceptation of the word, by which it signifies a very silly young fellow, who, from his extravagance and debauchery, has obtained the name of a genius, like *lucus a non lucendo*, because he has no genius at all.

" It is a shocking drawback from a father's happiness, when he sees his son blessed with strong natural parts and quick conception, to reflect that these very talents may be his ruin. If vanity once gets into his head, and gives it a wrong turn, the young coxcomb will neglect the means of improvement, trust entirely to his native abilities, and be as ridiculously proud of his parts, as the brats of quality are taught to be of their family. In the mean time, those whom nature threw far

behind him, are by application enabled to leave him at a distance in their turn; and he continues boasting of his genius, till it subsists no longer, but dies for want of cultivation. Thus vanity and indolence prevent his improvement; and if he is to rise in the world by his merit, take away the means of success, and perhaps reduce him to very miserable distresses. I know one of these early geniuses, who scarce supports himself by writing for a bookseller; and another, who is at leisure to contemplate his extraordinary parts in the Fleet prison."

Sir Richard Sutton, p. 79. — He was a younger son of Sir Robert Sutton and Lady Sunderland. When he went to Cambridge, in 1750, after having been long at the head of the school, Warburton introduced him by letter to Hurd, as the most extraordinary boy he had ever known. "If you won't take my word," he adds, "I will give you Dr. Nicoll's, who tells me he never met with his fellow! — a perfect boy in the simplicity of his manners, but of surprising acquirements. Besides his knowledge of the ancient languages, he speaks and writes Spanish and French with great exactness, understands Italian, and is now learning High Dutch."

Eleven years afterwards Hurd writes to Warburton, "Mr. Sutton did me the favor to steal away from his companions on the circuit last week, and to spend a day with me at Thurstaston. He seems intent upon his profession. But what pleased me most was to find the same sweetness of temper and simplicity of manners which he carried out with him when he made the grand tour. I took that short visit very kindly, and the more so, as he promises to repeat it as oft as he comes to Leicester." — *Nichols's Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century*, vol. v. 541, 2.

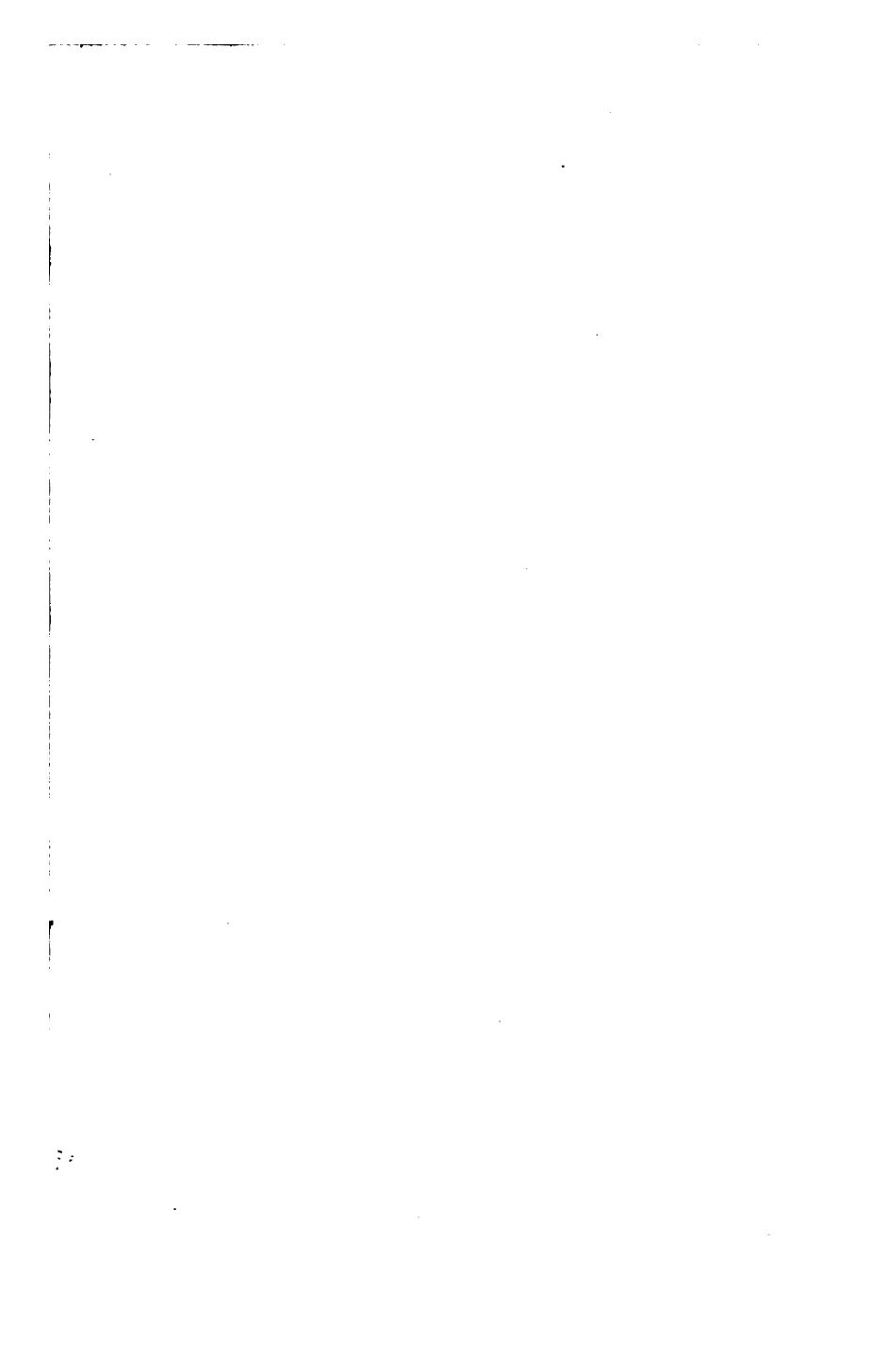
Mr. Sutton succeeded to his father's baronetcy, and I know not that he was heard of either in literature, or in public life, for both which he seems to have been so richly endowed by nature, and so carefully to have qualified himself. Indolence cannot have been the cause of this: probably he was wise enough to enjoy the blessings which fortune offered him, and which he could not have enjoyed unless he had been too wise to be ambitious of notoriety or power.

Whole Duty of Man, p. 87. — "Very strange," says the Monthly Review, (April, 1764,) "that several of our established clergy, who have had a liberal education, should seem ambitious, at this day, of rivalling the old Puritans in absurdity and fanaticism; and, under a pretence of supplying the defects, truly, of that excellent and useful tract called the *Whole Duty of Man*, they are presenting us with a *Wholer Duty of Man*, by introducing a system, or rather a farrago, of such doubtful, dark, and abstruse notions, as the author of the aforesaid tract had very prudently and piously omitted."

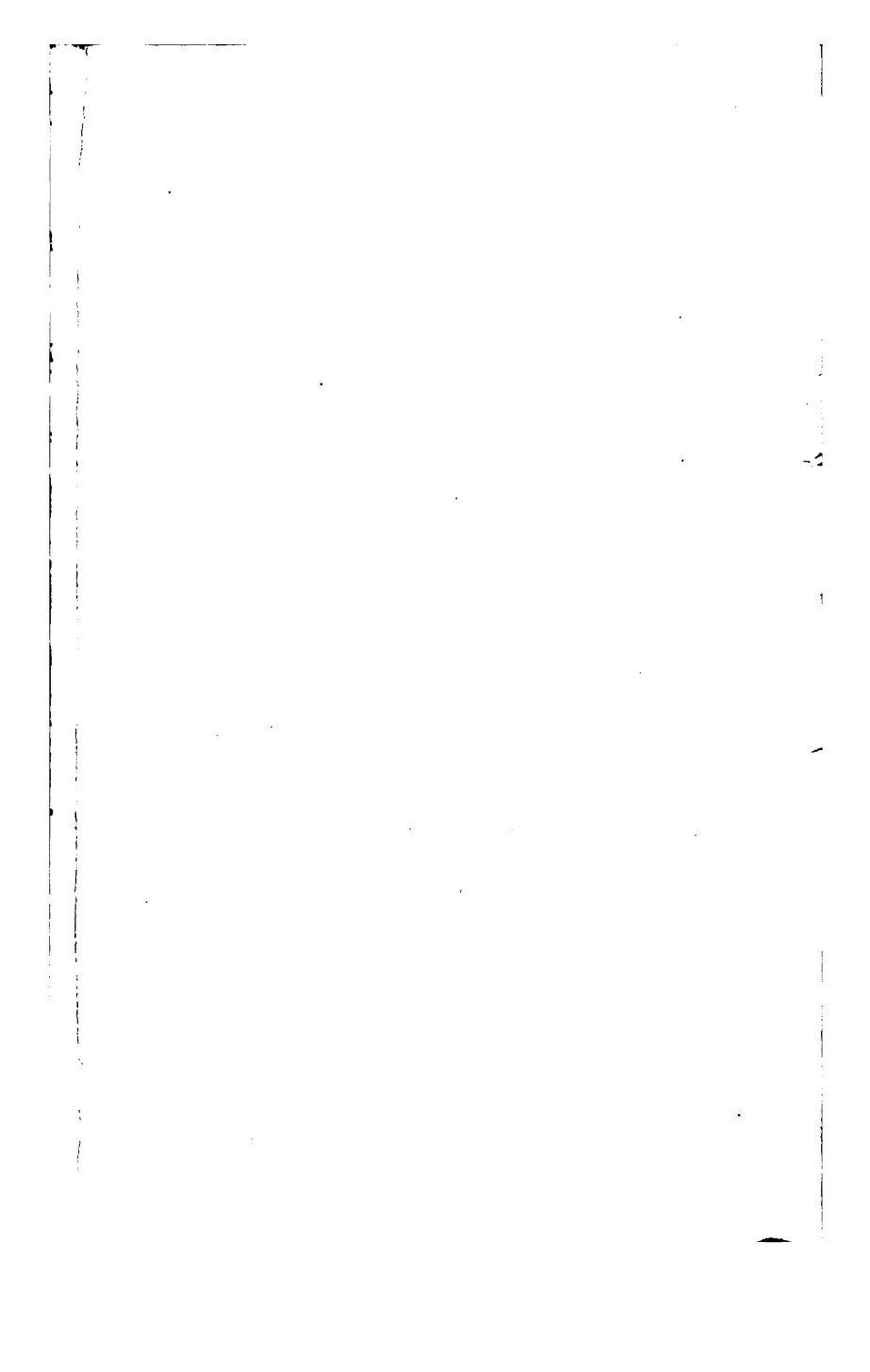
The Olney Hymns met with some opposition in a quarter where it was little expected, p. 199. — I have received, says Mr. Newton, (I suppose from the author,) a book Mr. Romaine has lately published on the subject of Psalmody. I wish he had treated it in a different manner. I do not feel myself hurt by his censure of modern hymn-makers, but I am afraid it will hurt some weak, well-meaning people, who consider him as little less than infallible, to be told, that whatever comfort they may think they have received from singing hymns in public worship was only imaginary. And he has laid himself very open to those who

- 19

25







**THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY
REFERENCE DEPARTMENT**

**This book is under no circumstances to be
taken from the Building**

MAY 15 1916

JUN 12 1917

JAN 31 1917

5 D APR 15 1916

**THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY
REFERENCE DEPARTMENT**

**This book is under no circumstances to be
taken from the Building**

MAY 15 1916

MAY 12 1916

JAN 31 1917

B'D APR 15 1945